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THUMBELISA
AND OTHER STORIES

From Hans Christian Andersen

Illustrated by Dugald Stewart Walker

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Otis E. Jenkins

THUMBELISA
AND OTHER STORIES

"You shall not be called Thumbelisa, that is such an ugly name, and you are so pretty. We will call you May"

THUMBELISA
AND OTHER STORIES
from Hans Christian Andersen

FAIRY RING SERIES

Illustrated by
Dugald Stewart Walker

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
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Coloured

"You shall not be called Thumbelisa, that is such an ugly name, and you are so pretty. We will call you May."

"The Day-spring from on high hath visited us. To give light to them that sit in darkness, and to guide their feet into the way of peace."

The courtiers looked most grand and proper . . . Numbers of tiny little elves danced around the hall.

Black and White

She was so happy now, because the toad could not reach her and she was sailing through such lovely scenes.

She who is related to the fairies!

"You shouldn't even tell me anything of the sort just now, it might have a bad effect upon the eggs."

The great dragon, hoarding his treasures, raised his head to look at them.

Great spiders spun their webs from branch to branch . . . and the fairies swung hand in hand upon the big dewdrops which covered the leaves and the long grass.

Oh, what a flight that was through the air; the wind caught her cloak, and the moon shone through it.

THUMBELISA
AND OTHER STORIES

THERE was once a woman who had the greatest longing for a little tiny child, but she had no idea where to get one; so she went to an old witch and said to her, "I do so long to have a little child, will you tell me where I can get one?"

"Oh, we shall be able to manage that," said the witch. "Here is a barley corn for you; it is not at all the same kind as that which grows in the peasant's field, or with which chickens are fed; plant it in a flower pot and you will see what will appear."

"Thank you, oh, thank you!" said the woman, and she gave the witch twelve pennies, then went home and planted the barley corn, and a large, handsome flower sprang up at once; it looked exactly like a tulip, but the petals were tightly shut up, just as if they were still in bud. "That is a lovely flower," said the woman, and she kissed the pretty red and yellow petals; as she kissed it the flower burst open with a loud snap. It was a real tulip, you could see that; but right in the middle of the flower on the green stool sat a little tiny

girl, most lovely and delicate; she was not more than an inch in height, so she was called Thumbelisa.

Her cradle was a smartly varnished walnut shell, with the blue petals of violets for a mattress and a rose-leaf to cover her; she slept in it at night, but during the day she played about on the table where the woman had placed a plate, surrounded by a wreath of flowers on the outer edge with their stalks in water. A large tulip petal floated on the water and on this little Thumbelisa sat and sailed about from one side of the plate to the other; she had two white horsehairs for oars. It was a pretty sight. She could sing, too, with such delicacy and charm as was never heard before.

One night as she lay in her pretty bed, a great ugly toad hopped in at the window, for there was a broken pane. Ugh! how hideous that great wet toad was; it hopped right down on to the table where Thumbelisa lay fast asleep, under the red rose-leaf.

"Here is a lovely wife for my son," said the toad, and then she took up the walnut shell where Thumbelisa slept and hopped away with it through the window, down into the garden. A great broad stream ran through it, but just at the edge it was swampy and muddy, and it was here that the toad lived with her son. Ugh! how ugly and hideous he was too, exactly like his mother. "Koax, koax, brekke-ke-kex," that was all he had to say when he saw the lovely little girl in the walnut shell.

"Do not talk so loud or you will wake her," said the old toad; "she might escape us yet, for she is as light as thistle-down! We will put her on one of the broad water-lily leaves out in the stream; it will be just like an island to her, she is so small and light. She won't be able to run away from there while we get the stateroom ready down under the mud, which you are to inhabit."

A great many water lilies grew in the stream, their broad green leaves looked as if they were floating on the surface of

the water. The leaf which was farthest from the shore was also the biggest and to this one the old toad swam out with the walnut shell in which little Thumbelisa lay.

The poor, tiny little creature woke up quite early in the morning, and when she saw where she was she began to cry most bitterly, for there was water on every side of the big green leaf, and she could not reach the land at any point.

The old toad sat in the mud decking out her abode with grasses and the buds of the yellow water lilies, so as to have it very nice for the new daughter-in-law, and then she swam out with her ugly son to the leaf where Thumbelisa stood; they wanted to fetch her pretty bed to place it in the bridal chamber before they took her there. The old toad made a deep curtsey in the water before her, and said, "Here is my son, who is to be your husband, and you are to live together most comfortably down in the mud."

"Koax, koax, brekke-ke-kex," that was all the son could say.

Then they took the pretty little bed and swam away with it, but Thumbelisa sat quite alone on the green leaf and cried because she did not want to live with the ugly toad, or have her horrid son for a husband. The little fish which swam about in the water had no doubt seen the toad and heard what she said, so they stuck their heads up, wishing, I suppose, to see the little girl. As soon as they saw her, they were delighted with her, and were quite grieved to think that she was to go down to live with the ugly toad. No, that should never happen. They flocked together down in the water round about the green stem which held the leaf she stood upon, and gnawed at it with their teeth till it floated away down the stream carrying Thumbelisa away where the toad could not follow her.

Thumbelisa sailed past place after place, and the little birds in the bushes saw her and sang, "what a lovely little maid." The leaf with her on it floated farther and farther away and in this manner reached foreign lands.

A pretty little white butterfly fluttered round and round her for some time and at last settled on the leaf, for it had taken quite a fancy to Thumbelisa: she was so happy now, because the toad could not reach her and she was sailing through such lovely scenes; the sun shone on the water and it looked like liquid gold. Then she took her sash and tied one end round the butterfly, and the other she made fast to the leaf which went gliding on quicker and quicker, and she with it, for she was standing on the leaf.

At this moment a big cockchafer came flying along; he caught sight of her and in an instant he fixed his claw round her slender waist and flew off with her up into a tree, but the green leaf floated down the stream and the butterfly with it, for he was tied to it and could not get loose.

Heavens! how frightened poor little Thumbelisa was when the cockchafer carried her up into the tree, but she was most of all grieved about the pretty white butterfly which she had fastened to the leaf; if he could not succeed in getting loose he would be starved to death.

But the cockchafer cared nothing for that. He settled with her on the largest leaf on the tree, and fed her with honey from the flowers, and he said that she was lovely although she was not a bit like a chafer. Presently all the other chafers which lived in the tree came to visit them; they looked at Thumbelisa and the young lady chafers twitched their feelers and said, "She has also got two legs, what a good effect it has." "She has no feelers," said another. "She is so slender in the waist, fie, she looks like a human being." "How ugly she is," said all the mother chafers, and yet little Thumbelisa was so pretty. That was certainly also the opinion of the cockchafer who had captured her, but when all the others said she was ugly, he at last began to believe it, too, and would not have anything more to do with her, she might go wherever she liked! They flew down from the tree with her and placed her on a daisy, where she cried because she was so ugly that the chafers would

She was so happy now, because the toad could not reach her
and she was sailing through such lovely scenes

have nothing to do with her; and, after all, she was more beautiful than anything you could imagine, as delicate and transparent as the finest rose-leaf.

Poor little Thumbelisa lived all the summer quite alone in the wood. She plaited a bed of grass for herself and hung it up under a big dock-leaf which sheltered her from the rain; she sucked the honey from the flowers for her food, and her drink was the dew which lay on the leaves in the morning. In this way the summer and autumn passed, but then came the winter. All the birds which used to sing so sweetly to her flew away, the great dock-leaf under which she had lived shrivelled up, leaving nothing but a dead yellow stalk, and she shivered with the cold, for her clothes were worn out; she was such a tiny creature, poor little Thumbelisa, she certainly must be frozen to death. It began to snow and every snowflake which fell upon her was like a whole shovelful upon one of us, for we are big and she was only one inch in height. Then she wrapped herself up in a withered leaf, but that did not warm her much, she trembled with the cold.

Close to the wood in which she had been living lay a large cornfield, but the corn had long ago been carried away and nothing remained but the bare, dry stubble which stood up out of the frozen ground. The stubble was quite a forest for her to walk about in: oh, how she shook with the cold. Then she came to the door of a field-mouse's home. It was a little hole down under the stubble. The field-mouse lived so cosily and warm there, her whole room was full of corn, and she had a beautiful kitchen and larder besides. Poor Thumbelisa stood just inside the door like any other poor beggar child and begged for a little piece of barley corn, for she had had nothing to eat for two whole days.

"You poor little thing," said the field-mouse, for she was at bottom a good old field-mouse. "Come into my warm room and dine with me." Then, as she took a fancy to Thumbelisa, she said, "You may with pleasure stay with me for the

winter, but you must keep my room clean and tidy and tell me stories, for I am very fond of them," and Thumbelisa did what the good old field-mouse desired and was on the whole very comfortable.

"Now we shall soon have a visitor," said the field-mouse; "my neighbour generally comes to see me every week-day. He is even better housed than I am; his rooms are very large, and he wears a most beautiful black velvet coat; if only you could get him for husband you would indeed be well settled, but he can't see. You must tell him all the most beautiful stories you know."

But Thumbelisa did not like this, and she would have nothing to say to the neighbour, for he was a mole. He came and paid a visit in his black velvet coat. He was very rich and wise, said the field-mouse, and his home was twenty times as large as hers; and he had much learning, but he did not like the sun or the beautiful flowers, in fact he spoke slightingly of them, for he had never seen them. Thumbelisa had to sing to him, and she sang both "Fly away, cockchafer" and "A monk, he wandered through the meadow," then the mole fell in love with her because of her sweet voice, but he did not say anything, for he was of a discreet turn of mind.

He had just made a long tunnel through the ground from his house to theirs, and he gave the field-mouse and Thumbelisa leave to walk in it whenever they liked. He told them not to be afraid of the dead bird which was lying in the passage. It was a whole bird with feathers and beak which had probably died quite recently at the beginning of the winter and was now entombed just where he had made his tunnel.

The mole took a piece of tinder-wood in his mouth, for that shines like fire in the dark, and walked in front of them to light them in the long dark passage; when they came to the place where the dead bird lay, the mole thrust his broad nose up to the roof and pushed the earth up so as to make a big hole through which the daylight shone. In the middle

of the floor lay a dead swallow, with its pretty wings closely pressed to its sides, and the legs and head drawn in under the feathers; no doubt the poor bird had died of cold. Thumbelisa was so sorry for it; she loved all the little birds, for they had twittered and sung so sweetly to her during the whole summer; but the mole kicked it with his short legs and said, "Now it will pipe no more! It must be a miserable fate to be born a little bird! Thank heaven! no child of mine can be a bird; a bird like that has nothing but its twitter and dies of hunger in the winter."

"Yes, as a sensible man, you may well say that," said the field-mouse. "What *has* a bird for all its twittering when the cold weather comes? It has to hunger and freeze, but then it must cut a dash."

Thumbelisa did not say anything, but when the others turned their backs to the bird, she stooped down and stroked aside the feathers which lay over its head, and kissed its closed eyes. "Perhaps it was this very bird which sang so sweetly to me in the summer," she thought; "what pleasure it gave me, the dear pretty bird."

The mole now closed up the hole which let in the daylight and conducted the ladies to their home. Thumbelisa could not sleep at all in the night, so she got up out of her bed and plaited a large handsome mat of hay and then she carried it down and spread it all over the dead bird, and laid some soft cotton wool which she had found in the field-mouse's room close round its sides, so that it might have a warm bed on the cold ground.

"Good-bye, you sweet little bird," said she, "good-bye, and thank you for your sweet song through the summer when all the trees were green and the sun shone warmly upon us." Then she laid her head close up to the bird's breast, but was quite startled at a sound, as if something was thumping inside it. It was the bird's heart. It was not dead but lay in a swoon, and now that it had been warmed it began to revive.

In the autumn all the swallows fly away to warm countries, but if one happens to be belated, it feels the cold so much that it falls down like a dead thing, and remains lying where it falls till the snow covers it up. Thumbelisa quite shook with fright, for the bird was very, very big beside her, who was only one inch high; but she gathered up her courage, packed the wool closer round the poor bird, and fetched a leaf of mint which she had herself for a coverlet, and laid it over the bird's head. The next night she stole down again to it and found it alive but so feeble that it could only just open its eyes for a moment to look at Thumbelisa who stood with a bit of tinder-wood in her hand, for she had no other lantern.

"Many, many thanks, you sweet child," said the sick swallow to her; "you have warmed me beautifully. I shall soon have strength to fly out into the warm sun again."

"Oh!" said she, "it is so cold outside, it snows and freezes, stay in your warm bed, I will tend you." Then she brought water to the swallow in a leaf, and when it had drunk some it told her how it had torn its wing on a blackthorn bush, and therefore could not fly as fast as the other swallows which were taking flight then for the distant warm lands. At last it fell down on the ground, but after that it remembered nothing and did not in the least know how it had got into the tunnel.

It stayed there all the winter, and Thumbelisa was good to it and grew very fond of it. She did not tell either the mole or the field-mouse anything about it, for they did not like the poor unfortunate swallow.

As soon as the spring came and the warmth of the sun penetrated the ground, the swallow said good-bye to Thumbelisa, who opened the hole which the mole had made above. The sun streamed in deliciously upon them, and the swallow asked if she would not go with him; she could sit upon his back and they would fly far away into the green wood. But Thumbelisa knew that it would grieve the old field-mouse if she left her like that.

"No, I can't," said Thumbelisa.

"Good-bye, good-bye, then, you kind pretty girl," said the swallow, and flew out into the sunshine. Thumbelisa looked after him and her eyes filled with tears, for she was very fond of the poor swallow.

"Tweet, tweet," sang the bird, and flew into the green wood.

Thumbelisa was very sad. She was not allowed to go out into the warm sunshine at all; the corn which was sown in the field near the field-mouse's house grew quite long; it was a thick forest for the poor little girl who was only an inch high.

"You must work at your trousseau this summer," said the field-mouse to her, for their neighbour the tiresome mole in his black velvet coat had asked her to marry him. "You shall have both woollen and linen, you shall have wherewith to clothe and cover yourself when you become the mole's wife." Thumbelisa had to turn the distaff and the field-mouse hired four spiders to spin and weave day and night. The mole paid a visit every evening, and he was always saying that when the summer came to an end the sun would not shine nearly so warmly, now it burnt the ground as hard as a stone. Yes, when the summer was over he would celebrate his marriage; but Thumbelisa was not at all pleased, for she did not care a bit for the tiresome mole. Every morning at sunrise and every evening at sunset she used to steal out to the door, and when the wind blew aside the tops of the cornstalks so that she could see the blue sky, she thought how bright and lovely it was out there, and wished so much to see the dear swallow again; but it never came back; no doubt it was a long way off, flying about in the beautiful green woods.

When the autumn came all Thumbelisa's outfit was ready.

"In four weeks you must be married," said the field-mouse to her. But Thumbelisa cried and said that she would not have the tiresome mole for a husband.

"Fiddle-dee-dee," said the field-mouse: "don't be obstinate or I shall bite you with my white tooth. You are going to have a splendid husband; the queen herself hasn't the equal of his black velvet coat; both his kitchen and his cellar are full. You should thank heaven for such a husband!"

So they were to be married; the mole had come to fetch Thumbelisa; she was to live deep down under the ground with him, and never to go out into the warm sunshine, for he could not bear it. The poor child was very sad at the thought of bidding good-bye to the beautiful sun; while she had been with the field-mouse she had at least been allowed to look at it from the door.

"Good-bye, you bright sun," she said as she stretched out her arms toward it and went a little way outside the field-mouse's house, for now the harvest was over and only the stubble remained. "Good-bye, good-bye!" she said, and threw her tiny arms round a little red flower growing there. "Give my love to the dear swallow if you happen to see him."

"Tweet, tweet," she heard at this moment above her head. She looked up; it was the swallow just passing. As soon as it saw Thumbelisa it was delighted; she told it how unwilling she was to have the ugly mole for a husband, and that she was to live deep down underground where the sun never shone. She could not help crying about it.

"The cold winter is coming," said the swallow, "and I am going to fly away to warm countries. Will you go with me? You can sit upon my back! Tie yourself on with your sash; then we will fly away from the ugly mole and his dark cavern, far away over the mountains to those warm countries where the sun shines with greater splendour than here, where it is always summer and there are heaps of flowers. Do fly with me, you sweet little Thumbelisa, who saved my life when I lay frozen in the dark earthy passage."

"Yes, I will go with you," said Thumbelisa, seating herself on the bird's back, with her feet on its outspread wings.

She tied her band tightly to one of the strongest feathers, and then the swallow flew away, high up in the air above forests and lakes, high up above the biggest mountains where the snow never melts; and Thumbelisa shivered in the cold air, but then she crept under the bird's warm feathers, and only stuck out her little head to look at the beautiful sights beneath her.

Then at last they reached the warm countries. The sun shone with a warmer glow than here; the sky was twice as high, and the most beautiful green and blue grapes grew in clusters on the banks and hedgerows. Oranges and lemons hung in the woods, which were fragrant with myrtles and sweet herbs, and beautiful children ran about the roads playing with the large gorgeously coloured butterflies. But the swallow flew on and on, and the country grew more and more beautiful. Under magnificent green trees on the shores of the blue sea stood a dazzling white marble palace of ancient date; vines wreathed themselves round the stately pillars. At the head of these there were countless nests, and the swallow who carried Thumbelisa lived in one of them.

"Here is my house," said the swallow; "but if you will choose one of the gorgeous flowers growing down there, I will place you in it, and you will live as happily as you can wish."

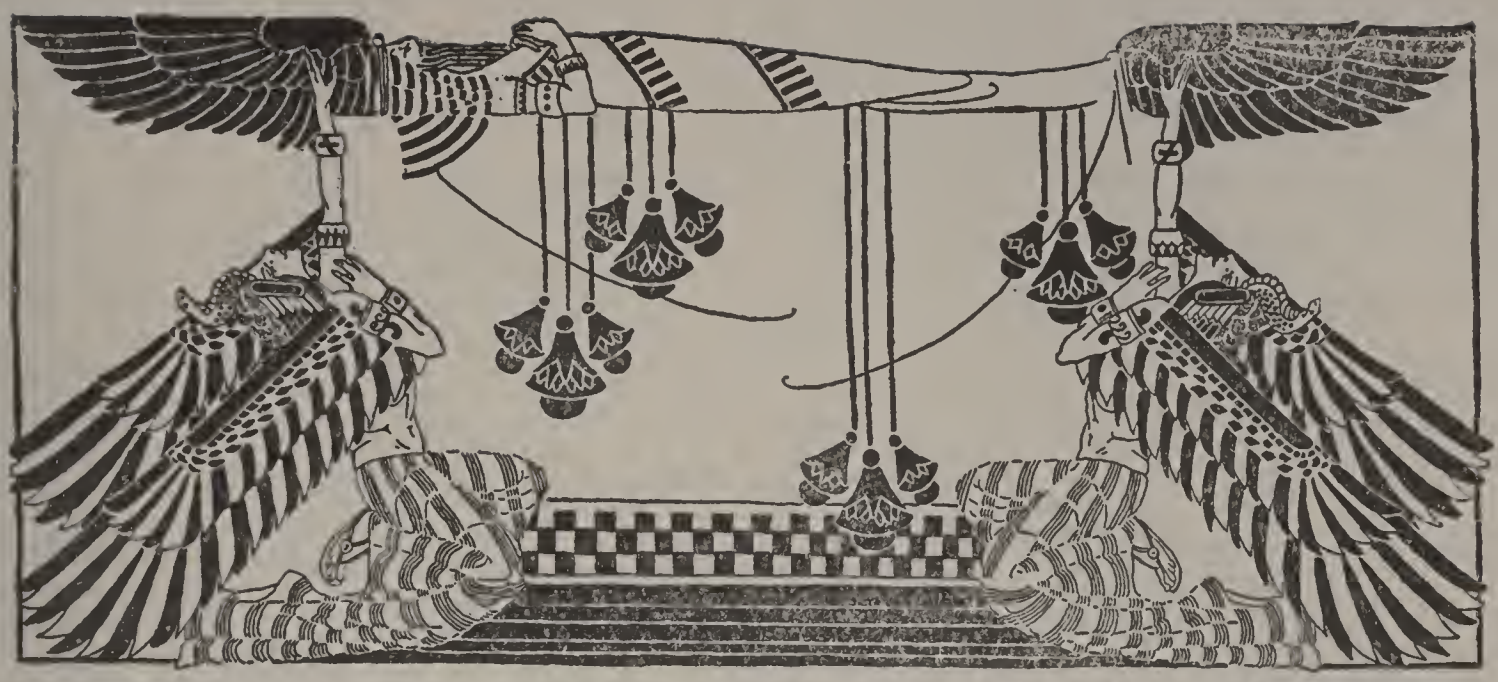
"That would be delightful," she said, and clapped her little hands.

A great white marble column had fallen to the ground and lay there broken in three pieces, but between these the most lovely white flowers grew. The swallow flew down with Thumbelisa and put her upon one of the broad leaves; what was her astonishment to find a little man in the middle of the flower, as bright and transparent as if he had been made of glass. He had a lovely golden crown upon his head and the most beautiful bright wings upon his shoulders; he was no bigger than Thumbelisa. He was the angel of the flowers. There was a similar little man or woman in every flower, but he was the king of them all.

"Heavens, how beautiful he is," whispered Thumbelisa to the swallow. The little prince was quite frightened by the swallow, for it was a perfect giant of a bird to him, he who was so small and delicate, but when he saw Thumbelisa he was delighted; she was the very prettiest girl he had ever seen. He therefore took the golden crown off his own head and placed it on hers, and asked her name, and if she would be his wife, and then she would be queen of the flowers! Yes, he was certainly a very different kind of husband from the toad's son, or the mole with his black velvet coat. So she accepted the beautiful prince, and out of every flower stepped a little lady or a gentleman so lovely that it was a pleasure to look at them. Each one brought a gift to Thumbelisa, but the best of all was a pair of pretty wings from a large white fly; they were fastened on to her back, and then she too could fly from flower to flower. All was then delight and happiness, but the swallow sat alone in his nest and sang to them as well as he could, for his heart was heavy, he was so fond of Thumbelisa himself, and would have wished never to part from her.

"You shall not be called Thumbelisa," said the angel of the flower to her; "that is such an ugly name, and you are so pretty. We will call you May."

"Good-bye, good-bye," said the swallow, and flew away again from the warm countries, far away back to Denmark; there he had a little nest above the window where the man lived who wrote this story, and he sang his "tweet, tweet," to the man, and so we have the whole story.



THE MARSH KING'S DAUGHTER

THE storks have a great many stories, which they tell their little ones, all about the bogs and the marshes. They suit them to their ages and capacity. The youngest ones are quite satisfied with "Kribble krabble," or some such nonsense; but the older ones want something with more meaning in it, or at any rate something about the family. We all know one of the two oldest and longest tales which have been kept up among the storks; the one about Moses, who was placed by his mother on the waters of the Nile, and found there by the king's daughter. How she brought him up and how he became a great man whose burial place nobody to this day knows. This is all common knowledge.

The other story is not known yet, because the storks have kept it among themselves. It has been handed on from one mother stork to another for more than a thousand years, and each succeeding mother has told it better and better, till we now tell it best of all.

The first pair of storks who told it, and who actually

lived it, had their summer quarters on the roof of the Viking's timbered house up by "Vidmosen" (the Wild Bog) in Wendsyssel. It is in the county of Hiörring, high up toward the Skaw, in the north of Jutland, if we are to describe it according to the authorities. There is still a great bog there, which we may read about in the county chronicles. This district used to be under the sea at one time, but the ground has risen, and it stretches for miles. It is surrounded on every side by marshy meadows, quagmires, and peat bogs, on which grow cloud berries and stunted bushes. There is nearly always a damp mist hanging over it, and seventy years ago it was still overrun with wolves. It may well be called the Wild Bog, and one can easily imagine how desolate and dreary it was among all these swamps and pools a thousand years ago. In detail everything is much the same now as it was then. The reeds grow to the same height, and have the same kind of long purple-brown leaves with feathery tips as now. The birch still grows there with its white bark and its delicate loosely hanging leaves. With regard to living creatures, the flies still wear their gauzy draperies of the same cut; and the storks now, as then, still dress in black and white, with long red stockings. The people certainly then had a very different cut for their clothes than at the present day; but if any of them, serf or huntsman, or anybody at all, stepped on the quagmires, the same fate befell him a thousand years ago as would overtake him now if he ventured on them — in he would go, and down he would sink to the Marsh King, as they call him. He rules down below over the whole kingdom of bogs and swamps. He might also be called King of the Quagmires, but we prefer to call him the Marsh King, as the storks did. We know very little about his rule, but that is perhaps just as well.

Near the bogs, close to the arm of the Cattegat, called the Limfiord, lay the timbered hall of the Vikings with its stone cellar, its tower, and its three storeys. The storks had built their nest on the top of the roof, and the mother stork was

She who is related to the fairies!

sitting on the eggs which she was quite sure would soon be successfully hatched.

One evening Father Stork stayed out rather late, and when he came back he looked somewhat ruffled.

"I have something terrible to tell you!" he said to the mother stork.

"Don't tell it to me then," she answered; "remember that I am sitting; it might upset me and that would be bad for the eggs!"

"You will have to know it," said he; "she has come here, the daughter of our host in Egypt. She has ventured to take the journey, and now she has disappeared."

"She who is related to the fairies! Tell me all about it. You know I can't bear to be kept waiting now I am sitting."

"Look here, mother! She must have believed what the doctor said as you told me; she believed that the marsh flowers up here would do something for her father, and she flew over here in feather plumage with the other two Princesses, who have to come north every year to take the baths to make themselves young. She came, and she has vanished."

"You go into too many particulars," said the mother stork; "the eggs might get a chill, and I can't stand being kept in suspense."

"I have been on the outlook," said Father Stork, "and to-night when I was among the reeds where the quagmire will hardly bear me, I saw three swans flying along, and there was something about their flight which said to me, 'Watch them, they are not real swans! They are only in swans' plumage.' You know, mother, as well as I, that one feels things intuitively, whether or not they are what they seem to be."

"Yes, indeed!" she said, "but tell me about the Princess. I am quite tired of hearing about swan's plumage."

"You know that in the middle of the bog there is a kind of lake," said Father Stork. "You can see a bit of it if you

raise your head. Well, there was a big alder stump between the bushes and the quagmire, and on this the three swans settled, flapping their wings and looking about them. Then one of them threw off the swan's plumage, and I at once recognized in her our Princess from Egypt. There she sat with no covering but her long black hair; I heard her beg the two others to take good care of the swan's plumage while she dived under the water to pick up the marsh flower which she thought she could see. They nodded and raised their heads, and lifted up the loose plumage. What are they going to do with it, thought I, and she no doubt asked them the same thing; and the answer came, she had ocular demonstration of it: they flew up into the air with the feather garment! 'Just you duck down,' they cried. 'Never again will you fly about in the guise of a swan; never more will you see the land of Egypt; you may sit in your swamp.' Then they tore the feather garment into a hundred bits, scattering the feathers all over the place, like a snowstorm; then away flew those two good-for-nothing Princesses."

"What a terrible thing!" said Mother Stork; "but I must have the end of it."

"The Princess moaned and wept! Her tears trickled down upon the alder stump, and then it began to move, for it was the Marsh King himself, who lives in the bog. I saw the stump turn round, and saw that it was no longer a stump; it stretched out long miry branches like arms. The poor child was terrified, and she sprang away on to the shaking quagmire where it would not even bear my weight, far less hers. She sank at once and the alder stump after her; it was dragging her down. Great black bubbles rose in the slime, and then there was nothing more to be seen. Now she is buried in the Wild Bog and never will she take back the flowers she came for to Egypt. You could not have endured the sight, mother!"

"You shouldn't even tell me anything of the sort just now,

"You shouldn't even tell me anything of the sort just now, it might have a bad effect upon the eggs"

it might have a bad effect upon the eggs. The Princess must look after herself. She will get help somehow; if it had been you or I, now, or one of our sort, all would have been over with us!"

"I mean to keep a watch, though, every day," said the stork, and he kept his word.

But a long time passed, and then one day he saw that a green stem shot up from the fathomless depths, and when it reached the surface of the water a leaf appeared at the top which grew broader and broader. Next a bud appeared close by it, and one morning at dawn, just as the stork was passing, the bud opened out in the warm rays of the sun, and in the middle of it lay a lovely baby, a little girl looking just as fresh as if she had just come out of a bath. She was so exactly like the Princess from Egypt that at first the stork thought it was she who had grown small; but when he put two and two together, he came to the conclusion that it was her child and the Marsh King's. This explained why she appeared in a water lily. "She can't stay there very long," thought the stork; "and there are too many of us in my nest as it is, but an idea has just come into my head! The Viking's wife has no child, and she has often wished for one. As I am always said to bring the babies, this time I will do so in earnest. I will fly away to the Viking's wife with the baby, and that will indeed be a joy for her."

So the stork took up the little girl and flew away with her to the timbered house, where he picked a hole in the bladder skin which covered the window, and laid the baby in the arms of the Viking's wife. This done, he flew home and told the mother stork all about it, and the young ones heard what he said; they were old enough to understand it.

"So you see that the Princess is not dead; she must have sent the baby up here, and I have found a home for her."

"I said so from the very first," said Mother Stork; "now just give a little attention to your own children; it is almost

time to start on our own journey. I feel a tingling in my wings every now and then! The cuckoo and the nightingale are already gone, and I hear from the quails that we shall soon have a good wind. Our young people will do themselves credit at the manœuvres if I know them aright!"

How delighted the Viking's wife was when she woke in the morning and found the little baby on her bosom! She kissed and caressed it; but it screamed and kicked terribly, and seemed anything but happy. At last it cried itself to sleep, and as it lay there a prettier little thing could not have been seen. The Viking's wife was delighted; body and soul were filled with joy. She was sure that now her husband and all his men would soon come back as unexpectedly as the baby had come. So she and her household busied themselves in putting the house in order against their return. The long coloured tapestries which she and her handmaids had woven with pictures of their gods — Odin, Thor, and Freya as they were called — were hung up. The serfs had to scour and polish the old shields which hung round the walls; cushions were laid on the benches, and logs upon the great hearth in the middle of the hall, so that the fire might be lighted at once. The Viking's wife helped with all this work herself, so that when evening came she was very tired and slept soundly. When she woke toward morning she was much alarmed at finding that the little baby had disappeared. She sprang up and lighted a pine chip and looked about. There was no baby, but at the foot of the bed sat a hideous toad. She was horrified at the sight, and seized up a heavy stick to kill it, but it looked at her with such curious sad eyes that she had not the heart to strike it. Once more she looked round and the toad gave a faint pitiful croak which made her start. She jumped out of bed and threw open the window shutter; the sun was just rising and its beams fell upon the bed and the great toad. All at once the monster's wide mouth seemed to contract, and to become small and rosy, the limbs stretched and again took

their lovely shapes, and it was her own dear little baby which lay there, and not a hideous frog.

"Whatever is this?" she cried; "I have had a bad dream. This is my own darling elfin child." She kissed it and pressed it to her heart, but it struggled and bit like a wild kitten.

Neither that day nor the next did the Viking lord come home, although he was on his way, but the winds were against him; they were blowing southward for the storks. "It is an ill wind that blows nobody good."

In the course of a few days and nights it became clear to the Viking's wife how matters stood with her little baby; some magic power had a terrible hold over her. In the daytime it was as beautiful as any fairy, but it had a bad, wicked temper; at night, on the other hand, she became a hideous toad, quiet and pathetic, with sad, mournful eyes. There were two natures in her both in soul and body continually shifting. The reason of it was that the little girl brought by the stork by day had her mother's form and her father's evil nature; but at night her kinship with him appeared in her outward form, and her mother's sweet nature and gentle spirit beamed out of the misshapen monster. Who could release her from the power of this witchcraft? It caused the Viking's wife much grief and trouble, and yet her heart yearned over the unfortunate being. She knew that she would never dare to tell her husband the true state of affairs, because he would without doubt, according to custom, have the poor child exposed on the highway for any one who chose to look after it. The good woman had not the heart to do this, and so she determined that he should only see the child by broad daylight.

One morning there was a sound of stork's wings swishing over the roof; during the night more than a hundred pairs of storks had made it their resting-place, after the great manœuvres, and they were now trying their wings before starting on their long southward flight.

"Every man ready!" they cried; "all the wives and children, too."

"How light we feel," cried the young storks; "our legs tingle as if we were full of live frogs! How splendid it is to be travelling to foreign lands."

"Keep in line!" said father and mother, "and don't let your beaks clatter so fast; it isn't good for the chest." Then away they flew.

At the very same moment a horn sounded over the heath. The Viking had landed with all his men; they were bringing home no end of rich booty from the Gallic coast, where the people cried in their terror as did the people of Britain:

"Deliver us from the wild Northmen!"

What life and noise came to the Viking's home by the Wild Bog now! The mead cask was brought into the hall, the great fire lighted, and horses slaughtered for the feast, which was to be an uproarious one. The priest sprinkled the thralls with the warm blood of the horses as a consecration. The fire crackled and roared, driving the smoke up under the roof, and the soot dripped down from the beams; but they were used to all that. Guests were invited and they received handsome presents. All feuds and double-dealing were forgotten. They drank deeply, and threw the knuckle-bones in each other's faces when they had gnawed them, but that was a mark of good feeling. The Skald — the minstrel of the times, but he was also a warrior, for he went with them on their expeditions, and he knew what he was singing about — gave them one of his ballads recounting all their warlike deeds and their prowess. After every verse came the same refrain: "Fortunes may be lost, friends may die, one dies one's self, but a glorious name never dies!" Then they banged on the shields, and hammered with knives or the knuckle-bones on the table before them, till the hall rang.

The Viking's wife sat on the cross bench in the banqueting hall. She was dressed in silk with gold bracelets and

large ember beads. The Skald brought her name into the song, too; he spoke of the golden treasure she had brought to her wealthy husband, and his delight at the beautiful child which at present he had only seen under its charming daylight guise. He rather admired her passionate nature, and said she would grow into a doughty shield maiden or Valkyrie, able to hold her own in battle. She would be of the kind who would not blink if a practised hand cut off her eyebrows in jest with a sharp sword. The barrel of mead came to an end, and a new one was rolled up in its place; this one, too, was soon drained to the dregs, but they were a hard-headed people who could stand a great deal. They had a proverb then, "The beast knows when it is time to go home from grass, but the fool never knows when he has had enough." They knew it very well, but people often know one thing and yet do another. They also knew that "the dearest friend becomes a bore if he sits too long in one's house!" but yet they sat on. Meat and drink are such good things! They were a jovial company! At night the thralls slept among the warm ashes, and they dipped their fingers in the sooty grease and licked them. Those were rare times indeed.

The Viking went out once more that year on a raid, although the autumn winds were beginning; he sailed with his men to the coast of Britain; "it was just over the water," he said. His wife remained at home with the little girl, and certain it was that the foster-mother soon grew fonder of the poor toad with the pathetic eyes and plaintive sighs than she was of the little beauty who tore and bit.

The raw, wet autumn fog "Gnaw-worm" which gnaws the leaves off the trees, lay over wood and heath; and "Bird loose-feather," as they call the snow, followed closely upon each other. Winter was on its way. The sparrows took the storks' nest under their protection, and discussed the absent owners in their own fashion. The stork couple and their young — where were they now?

The storks were in the land of Egypt under such a sun as we have on a warm summer's day! They were surrounded by flowering tamarinds and acacias. Mahomet's crescent glittered from every cupola on the mosques, and many a pair of storks stood on the slender towers resting after their long journey. Whole flocks of them had their nests side by side on the mighty pillars, or the ruined arches of the deserted temples. The date palm lifted high its screen of branches as if to form a sunshade. The grayish white pyramids stood like shadowy sketches against the clear atmosphere of the desert, where the ostrich knew it would find space for its stride. The lion crouched gazing with its great wise eyes at the marble Sphinx half buried in the sand. The Nile waters had receded and the land teemed with frogs; to the storks this was the most splendid sight in all the land. The eyes of the young ones were quite dazzled with the sight.

"See what it is to be here, and we always have the same in our warm country," said the mother stork, and the stomachs of the little ones tingled.

"Is there anything more to see?" they asked; "shall we go any farther inland?"

"There is not much more to see," said the mother stork. "On the fertile side there are only secluded woods where the trees are interlaced by creeping plants. The elephant, with its strong clumsy legs, is the only creature which can force a way through. The snakes there are too big for us, and the lizards are too nimble. If you go out into the desert you will get sand in your eyes if the weather is good, and if it is bad you may be buried in a sandstorm. No, we are best here; there are plenty of frogs and grasshoppers. Here I stay and you, too!" And so she stayed.

The old ones stayed in their nests on the slender minarets resting themselves, but at the same time busily smoothing their feathers and rubbing their beaks upon their red stockings. Or they would lift up their long necks and gravely

bow their heads, their brown eyes beaming wisely. The young stork misses walked about gravely among the juicy reeds, casting glances at the young bachelor storks, or making acquaintance with them; they would swallow a frog at every third step, or walk about with a small snake dangling from their beak; it had such a good effect, they thought, and then it tasted so good. The young he-storks engaged in many a petty quarrel, in which they flapped their wings furiously and stabbed each other with their beaks till the blood came. Then they took mates and built nests for themselves; it was what they lived for. New quarrels soon arose, for in these warm countries people are terribly passionate. All the same it was very pleasant to the old ones; nothing could be wrong that their young ones did. There was sunshine every day, and plenty to eat; nothing to think of but pleasure!

But in the great palace of their Egyptian host, as they called him, matters were not so pleasant. The rich and mighty lord lay stretched upon his couch, as stiff in every limb as if he had been a mummy. The great painted hall was as gorgeous as if he had been lying within a tulip. Relatives and friends stood around him — he was not dead — yet he could hardly be called living. The healing marsh flower from the northern lands, which was to be found and plucked by the one who loved him best, would never be brought. His young and lovely daughter, who in the plumage of a swan had flown over sea and land to the far north, would never return. The two other swan Princesses had come back and this is the tale they told:

"We were all flying high up in the air when a huntsman saw us and shot his arrow; it pierced our young friend to the heart, and she slowly sank. As she sank she sang her farewell song and fell into the midst of a forest pool. There by the shore under a drooping birch we buried her; but we had our revenge; we bound fire under the wings of a swallow which had its nest under the eaves of his cottage. The roof took fire and the cottage blazed up and he was burnt in it. The flames

shone on the pool where she lay, earth of the earth, under the birch. Never more will she come back to the land of Egypt."

Then they both wept, and the father stork who heard it clattered with his beak and said, "Pack of lies; I should like to drive my beak right into their breasts!"

"Where it would break off, and a nice sight you would be then," said the mother stork. "Think of yourself first and then of your family; everything else comes second to that!"

"I will perch upon the open cupola to-morrow when the wise and learned folk assemble to talk about the sick man; perhaps they will get a little nearer to the truth!"

The sages met together and talked long and learnedly, but the stork could neither make head nor tail of it. Nothing came of it, however, either for the sick man or for his daughter who was buried in the Wild Bog; but we may just as well hear what they said and we may, perhaps, understand the story better, or at least as well as the stork.

"Love is the food of life! The highest love nourishes the highest life! Only through love can this life be won back!" This had been said and well said, declared the sages.

"It is a beautiful idea!" said Father Stork at once.

"I don't rightly understand it," said the mother stork; "however, that is not my fault, but the fault of the idea. It really does not matter to me, though; I have other things to think about!"

The sages had talked a great deal about love, the difference between the love of lovers, and that of parent and child, light and vegetation, and how the sunbeams kissed the mire and forthwith young shoots sprang into being. The whole discourse was so learned that the father stork could not take it in, far less repeat it. He became quite pensive and stood on one leg for a whole day with his eyes half shut. Learning was a heavy burden to him.

Yet one thing the stork had thoroughly comprehended:

he had heard from high and low alike what a misfortune it was to thousands of people and to the whole country, that this man should be lying sick without hope of recovery. It would indeed be a blessed day which should see his health restored. "But where blossoms the flower of healing for him?" they had asked of one another, and they had also consulted all their learned writings, the twinkling stars, the winds and the waves. The only answer that the sages had been able to give was, "Love is the food of life!" but how to apply the saying they knew not. At last all were agreed that succour must come through the Princess who loved her father with her whole heart and soul. And they at last decided what she was to do. It was more than a year and a day since they had sent her at night, when there was a new moon, out into the desert to the Sphinx. Here she had to push away the sand from the door at the base of it, and walk through the long passage which led right into the middle of the pyramid, where one of the mightiest of their ancient kings lay swathed in his mummy's bands in the midst of his wealth and glory. Here she was to bend her head to the corpse, and it would be revealed to her where she would find healing and salvation for her father.

All this she had done, and the exact spot had been shown her in dreams where in the depths of the morass she would find the lotus flower that would touch her bosom beneath the water. And this she was to bring home. So she flew away in her swan's plumage to the Wild Bog in the far north.

Now all this the father and mother stork had known from the beginning, and we understand the matter better than we did. We know that the Marsh King dragged her down to himself, and that to those at home she was dead and gone. The wisest of them said like the mother stork, "She will look out for herself!" so they awaited her return, not knowing in fact what else to do.

"I think I will snatch away the swans' plumage from the

two deceitful Princesses," said the father stork. "Then they could not go to the Wild Bog to do any more mischief. I will keep the plumages up there till we find a use for them."

"Up where will you keep them?" asked the mother stork.

"In our nest at the Wild Bog," said he. "The young ones and I can carry them between us, and if they are too cumbersome, there are places enough on the way where we can hide them till our next flight. One plumage would be enough for her, but two are better; it is a good plan to have plenty of wraps in a northern country!"

"You will get no thanks for it," said the mother stork; "but you are the master. I have nothing to say except when I am sitting."

In the meantime the little child in the Viking's hall by the Wild Bog, whither the storks flew in the spring, had had a name given her: it was Helga, but such a name was far too gentle for such a wild spirit as dwelt within her. Month by month it showed itself more, and year by year, whilst the storks took the same journey, in autumn toward the Nile, and in spring toward the Wild Bog. The little child grew to be a big girl, and before one knew how, she was the loveliest maiden possible of sixteen. The husk was lovely but the kernel was hard and rough; wilder than most, even in those hard, wild times.

Her greatest pleasure was to dabble her white hands in the blood of the horses slaughted for sacrifice; in her wild freaks she would bite the heads off the black cocks which the priest was about to slay, and she said in full earnest to her foster father, "If thy foe were to come and throw a rope round the beams of thy house and pull it about thine ears, I would not wake thee if I could. I should not hear him for the tingling of the blood in the ear thou once boxed years ago! I do not forget!"

But the Viking did not believe what she said. He, like everybody else, was infatuated by her beauty, nor did he

know how body and soul changed places in his little Helga in the dark hours of the night. She rode a horse bare-backed as if she were a part of it, nor did she jump off while her steed bit and fought with the other wild horses. She would often throw herself from the cliff into the sea in all her clothes, and swim out to meet the Viking when his boat neared the shore; and she cut off the longest strand of her beautiful long hair to string her bow. "Self made is well made," said she.

The Viking's wife, though strong-willed and strong-minded after the fashion of the times, became toward her daughter like any other weak anxious mother, because she knew that a spell rested over the terrible child. Often when her mother stepped out on to the balcony Helga, from pure love of teasing it seemed, would sit down upon the edge of the well, throw up her hands and feet, and go backward plump into the dark narrow hole. Here with her frog's nature she would rise again and clamber out like a cat dripping with water, carrying a perfect stream into the banqueting hall, washing aside the green twigs strewn on the floor.

One bond, however, always held little Helga in check, and that was twilight; when it drew near, she became quiet and pensive, allowing herself to be called and directed. An inner perception as it were drew her toward her mother, and when the sun sank and the transformation took place, she sat sad and quiet, shrivelled up into the form of a toad. Her body was now much bigger than those creatures ever are, but for that reason all the more unsightly. She looked like a wretched dwarf with the head of a frog and webbed fingers. There was something so piteous in her eyes; and voice she had none, only a hollow croak like the smothered sobs of a dreaming child. Then the Viking's wife would take it on her knee, and looking into its eyes would forget the misshapen form, and would often say, "I could almost wish that thou wouldst always remain my dumb frog-child. Thou art more terrible

to look at when thou art clothed in beauty." Then she would write Runes against sickness and sorcery, and throw them over the miserable girl, but they did no good at all.

"One would never think that she had been small enough to lie in a water lily!" said the father stork. "Now she is grown up, and the very image of her Egyptian mother, whom we never saw again! She did not manage to take such good care of herself as you and the sages said she would. I have been flying across the marsh year in, year out, and never have I seen a trace of her. Yes, I may as well tell you that all these years when I have come on in advance of you to look after the nest and set it to rights, I have spent many a night flying about like an owl or a bat scanning the open water, but all to no purpose. Nor have we had any use for the two swan plumages which the young ones and I dragged up here with so much difficulty; it took us three journeys to get them here. They have lain for years in the bottom of the nest, and if ever a disaster happens, such as a fire in the timbered house, they will be entirely lost."

"And our good nest would be lost too," said the mother stork; "but you think less of that than you do of your feather dresses, and your marsh Princess. You had better go down to her one day and stay in the mire for good. You are a bad father to your own chicks, and I have always said so since the first time I hatched a brood. If only we or the young ones don't get an arrow through our wings from that mad Viking girl. She doesn't know what she is about. We are rather more at home here than she is, and she ought to remember that. We never forget our obligations. Every year we pay our toll of a feather, an egg, and a young one, as it is only right we should. Do you think that while she is about I care to go down there as I used to do, and as I do in Egypt when I am 'hail fellow well met' with everybody, and where I peep into their pots and kettles if I like? No, indeed; I sit up here vexing myself about her, the vixen, and you too. You should have

left her in the water lily, and there would have been an end of her."

"You are much more estimable than your words," said the father stork. "I know you better than you know yourself, my dear." Then he gave a hop and flapped his wings thrice, proudly stretched out his neck and soared away without moving his outspread wings. When he had gone some distance he made some more powerful strokes, his head and neck bending proudly forward, while his plumage gleamed in the sunshine. What strength and speed there were in his flight!

"He is the handsomest of them all yet," said the mother stork; "but I don't tell him that."

The Viking came home early that autumn with his booty and prisoners; among these was a young Christian priest, one of those men who persecuted the heathen gods of the north. There had often been discussions of late, both in the hall and in the women's bower, about the new faith which was spreading in all the countries to the south. Through the holy Ansgarius it had spread as far as Hedeby on the Schlei. Even little Helga had heard of the belief in the "White Christ," who from love to man had given Himself for their salvation. As far as Helga was concerned it had all gone in at one ear and out at the other, as one says. The very meaning of the word "love" only seemed to dawn upon her when she was shrivelled up into the form of a frog in her secret chamber, but the Viking's wife had listened to the story and had felt herself strangely moved by these tales about the Son of the only true God.

The men on their return from their raids told them all about the temples built of costly polished stone, which were raised to Him whose message was Love. Once a couple of heavy golden vessels of cunning workmanship were brought home about which hung a peculiar spicy odour. They were censers used by the Christian priests to swing before the altars on which blood never flowed, but where the bread and wine

were changed to the Body and Blood of Him who gave Himself for the yet unborn generations.

The young priest was imprisoned in the deep stone cellars of the timber house and his feet and hands were bound with strips of bark. He was as "beautiful as Baldur," said the Viking's wife, and she felt pity for him, but young Helga proposed that he should be hamstrung and be tied to the tails of wild oxen.

"Then would I let the dogs loose on him. Hie and away over marshes and pools; that would be a merry sight, and merrier still would it be to follow in his course."

However, this was not the death the Viking wished him to die, but rather that, as a denier and a persecutor of the great gods, he should be offered up in the morning upon the bloodstone in the groves. For the first time a man was to be sacrificed here. Young Helga begged that she might sprinkle the effigies of the gods and the people with his blood. She polished her sharp knife, and when one of the great ferocious dogs, of which there were so many about the place, sprang toward her, she dug her knife into its side, "to try it," she said; but the Viking's wife looked sadly at the wild, badly disposed girl. When the night came and the girl's beauty of body and soul changed places, she spoke tender words of grief from her sorrowful heart. The ugly toad with its ungainly body stood fixing its sad brown eyes upon her, listening and seeming to understand with the mind of a human being.

"Never once to my husband has a word of my double grief through you passed my lips," said the Viking's wife. "My heart is full of grief for you, great is a mother's love! But love never entered your heart; it is like a lump of cold clay. However did you get into my house?"

Then the ungainly creature trembled, as if the words touched some invisible chord between body and soul, and great tears came into its eyes.

"A bitter time will come to you," said the Viking's wife,

"and it will be a terrible one to me, too! Better would it have been, if as a child you had been exposed on the highway, and lulled by the cold to the sleep of death!" And the Viking's wife shed bitter tears, and went away in anger and sorrow, passing under the curtain of skins which hung from the beams and divided the hall.

The shrivelled-up toad crouched in the corner, and a dead silence reigned. At intervals a half-stifled sigh rose within her; it was as if in anguish something came to life in her heart. She took a step forward and listened, then she stepped forward again and grasped the heavy bar of the door with her clumsy hands. Softly she drew it back, and silently lifted the latch; then she took up the lamp which stood in the ante-room. It seemed as if a strong power gave her strength. She drew out the iron bolt from the barred cellar door, and slipped in to the prisoner. He was asleep; she touched him with her cold clammy hand, and when he woke and saw the hideous creature, he shuddered as if he beheld an evil apparition. She drew out her knife and cut his bonds asunder, and then beckoned him to follow her. He named the Holy name, and made the sign of the cross, and as the form remained unchanged, he repeated the words of the Psalmist: "Blessed is the man who hath pity on the poor and needy; the Lord will deliver him in the time of trouble!" Then he asked, "Who art thou, whose outward appearance is that of an animal, whilst thou willingly performest deeds of mercy?"

The toad only beckoned him and led him behind the sheltering curtains down a long passage to the stable, pointed to a horse, on to which he sprang and she after him. She sat in front of him clutching the mane of the animal. The prisoner understood her and they rode at a quick pace along a path he never would have found to the heath. He forgot her hideous form, knowing that the mercy of the Lord worked through the spirits of darkness. He prayed and sang holy songs which made her tremble. Was it the power of prayer

and his singing working upon her, or was it the chill air of the advancing dawn? What were her feelings? She raised herself and wanted to stop and jump off the horse, but the Christian priest held her tightly, with all his strength, and sang aloud a psalm as if this could lift the spell which held her.

The horse bounded on more wildly than before, the sky grew red, and the first sunbeams pierced the clouds. As the stream of light touched her, the transformation took place. She was once more a lovely maiden, but her demoniac spirit was the same. The priest held a blooming maiden in his arms and he was terrified at the sight. He stopped the horse and sprang down, thinking he had met with a new device of the evil one. But young Helga sprang to the ground too. The short child's frock only reached to her knee. She tore the sharp knife from her belt and rushed upon the startled man. "Let me get at thee!" she cried; "let me reach thee and my knife shall pierce thee! Thou art ashen pale, beardless slave!"

She closed upon him and they wrestled together, but an invisible power seemed to give strength to the Christian; he held her tight, and the old oak under which they stood seemed to help him, for the loosened roots above the ground tripped her up. Close by rose a bubbling spring and he sprinkled her with water and commanded the unclean spirit to leave her, making the sign of the cross over her according to Christian usage. But the baptismal water has no power if the spring of faith flows not from within. Yet even here something more than man's strength opposed itself, through him, against the evil which struggled within her. Her arms fell, and she looked with astonishment and paling cheeks at this man who seemed to be a mighty magician skilled in secret arts. These were dark Runes he was repeating and cabalistic signs he was tracing in the air. She would not have blanched had he flourished a shining sword or a sharp axe before her face, but she trembled now as he traced the sign of the cross upon her forehead and

The great dragon, hoarding his treasures, raised his head to look at them

bosom, and sat before him with drooping head like a wild bird tamed.

He spoke gently to her about the deed of love she had performed for him this night, when she came in the hideous shape of a toad, cut his bonds asunder, and led him out to light and life. She herself was bound, he said, and with stronger bonds than his; but she also, through him, should reach to light and life everlasting. He would take her to Hedeby to the holy Ansgarius, and there, in that Christian city, the spell would be removed; but she must no longer sit in front of him on the horse, even if she went of her own free will; he dared not carry her thus.

"Thou must sit behind me, not before me; thy magic beauty has a power given by the Evil One which I dread; yet shall I have the victory through Christ!"

He knelt down and prayed humbly and earnestly. It seemed as if the quiet wood became a holy church consecrated by his worship. The birds began to sing as if they too were also of this new congregation, and the fragrance of the wild flowers was as the ambrosial perfume of incense, while the young priest recited the words of Holy Writ: "The Day-spring from on high hath visited us. To give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide their feet into the way of peace."

He spoke of the yearning of all nature for redemption, and while he spoke the horse which had carried them stood quietly by, only rustling among the bramble-bushes, making the ripe, juicy fruit fall into little Helga's hands, as if inviting her to refresh herself. Patiently she allowed herself to be lifted on to the horse's back, and sat there like one in a trance, who neither watches nor wonders. The Christian man bound together two branches in the shape of a cross, which he held aloft in his hand as he rode through the wood. The brushwood grew thicker and thicker, till at last it became a trackless wilderness. Bushes of the wild sloe blocked the way, and

they had to ride round them. The bubbling springs turned to standing pools, and these they also had to ride round; still, they found strength and refreshment in the pure breezes of the forest, and no less a power in the tender words of faith and love spoken by the young priest in his fervent desires to lead this poor straying one into the way of light and love.

It is said that raindrops can wear a hollow in the hardest stone, and the waves of the sea can smooth and round the jagged rocks; so did the dew of mercy, falling upon little Helga, soften all that was hard, and smooth all that was rough in her. Not that these effects were yet to be seen; she did not even know that they had taken place, any more than the buried seed lying in the earth knows that the refreshing showers and the warm sunbeams will cause it to flourish and bloom.

As the mother's song unconsciously falls upon the child's heart, it stammers the words after her without understanding them; but later they crystallize into thoughts, and in time become clear. In this way the "Word" also worked here in the heart of Helga.

They rode out of the wood, over a heath, and again through trackless forests. Toward evening they met a band of robbers.

"Where hast thou stolen this beautiful child?" they cried, stopping the horse and pulling down the two riders, for they were a numerous party.

The priest had no weapon but the knife which he had taken from little Helga, and with this he struck out right and left. One of the robbers raised his axe to strike him, but the Christian succeeded in springing on one side, or he would certainly have been hit; but the blade flew into the horse's neck, so that the blood gushed forth, and it fell to the ground dead. Then little Helga, as if roused from a long deep trance, rushed forward and threw herself on to the gasping horse. The priest placed himself in front of her as a shield and defence; but one of the robbers swung his iron club with such

force at his head that the blood and the brains were scattered about, and he fell dead upon the ground.

The robbers seized little Helga by her white arms, but the sun was just going down, and as the last rays vanished she was changed into the form of a frog. A greenish white mouth stretched half over her face; her arms became thin and slimy; while broad hands, with webbed fingers, spread themselves out like fans. The robbers in terror let her go, and she stood among them a hideous monster; and, according to frog nature, she bounded away with great leaps as high as herself, and disappeared in the thicket. Then the robbers perceived that this must be Loki's evil spirit or some other witchcraft, and they hurried away affrighted.

The full moon had risen and was shining in all its splendour when poor little Helga, in the form of a frog, crept out of the thicket. She stopped by the body of the Christian priest and the dead horse; she looked at them with eyes which seemed to weep; a sob came from the toad like that of a child bursting into tears. She threw herself down, first upon one, and then on the other, and brought water in her hand, which, from being large and webbed, formed a cup. This she sprinkled them with, but they were dead, and dead they must remain! This she understood. Soon wild animals would come and devour them; but no, that should never be; so she dug into the ground as deep as she could; she wished to dig a grave for them. She had nothing but the branch of a tree and her two hands, and she tore the web between her fingers till the blood ran from them. She soon saw that the task would be beyond her, so she fetched fresh water and washed the face of the dead man, and strewed fresh green leaves over it. She also brought large boughs to cover him, and scattered dried leaves between the branches. Then she brought the heaviest stones she could carry, and laid them over the dead body, filling up the spaces with moss. Now she thought the mound was strong and secure enough, but the difficult task had employed the whole night; the sun

was just rising, and there stood little Helga in all her beauty with bleeding hands and maidenly tears for the first time on her blushing cheeks.

It was in this transformation as if two natures were struggling in her; she trembled and glanced round as if she were just awakening from a troubled dream. She leaned for support against a slender beech, and at last climbed to the topmost branches like a cat and seated herself firmly upon them. She sat there for the whole livelong day like a frightened squirrel in the solitude of the wood where all is still, and dead, as they say.

Dead — well, there flew a couple of butterflies whirling round and round each other, and close by were some ant-hills, each with its hundreds of busy little creatures swarming to and fro. In the air danced countless midges, and swarm upon swarm of flies, lady-birds, dragon-flies with golden wings, and other little winged creatures. The earthworm crept forth from the moist ground, and the moles — but excepting these all was still and dead around; when people say this they don't quite understand what they mean. None noticed little Helga but a flock of jackdaws which flew chattering round the tree where she sat. They hopped along the branch toward her, boldly inquisitive, but a glance from her eye was enough to drive them away. They could not make her out, though, any more than she could understand herself.

When the evening drew near and the sun began to sink, the approaching transformation roused her to fresh exertion. She slipped down gently from the tree, and when the last sunbeam was extinguished she sat there once more, the shrivelled-up frog with her torn, webbed hands; but her eyes now shone with a new beauty which they had hardly possessed in all the pride of her loveliness. These were the gentlest and tenderest maiden's eyes which now shone out of the face of the frog. They bore witness to the existence of deep feeling and a human heart; and the beauteous eyes overflowed with tears, weeping precious drops that lightened the heart.

The cross made of branches, the last work of him who now was dead and cold, still lay by the grave. Little Helga took it up, the thought came unconsciously, and she placed it between the stones which covered man and horse. At the sad recollection her tears burst forth again, and in this mood she traced the same sign in the earth round the grave — and as she formed with both hands the sign of the cross, the webbed skin fell away from her fingers like a torn glove. She washed her hands at the spring and gazed in astonishment at their delicate whiteness. Again she made the holy sign in the air, between herself and the dead man; her lips trembled, her tongue moved, and the name which she in her ride through the forest had so often heard rose to her lips, and she uttered the words "Jesus Christ."

The frog's skin fell away from her; she was the beautiful young maiden, but her head bent wearily and her limbs required rest. She slept. But her sleep was short; she was awakened at midnight; before her stood the dead horse prancing and full of life, which shone forth from his eyes and his wounded neck. Close by his side appeared the murdered Christian priest, "more beautiful than Baldur," the Viking's wife might indeed have said, and yet he was surrounded by flames of fire.

There was such earnestness in his large, mild eyes, and such righteous judgment in his penetrating glance which pierced into the remotest corners of her heart, that little Helga trembled, and every memory within her was awakened as if it had been the day of Judgment. Every kindness which had ever been shown her, every loving word which had been said to her, came vividly before her. She now understood that it was love which had sustained her in those days of trial, through which all creatures formed of dust and clay, soul and spirit, must wrestle and struggle. She acknowledged that she had but followed whither she was called, had done nothing for herself; all had been given her. She bent now in lowly humility, and full of shame, before Him who could read every impulse of her heart; and in

that moment she felt the purifying flame of the Holy Spirit thrill through her soul.

"Thou daughter of earth!" said the Christian martyr, "out of the earth art thou come, from the earth shalt thou rise again! The sunlight within thee shall consciously return to its origin; not the beams of the actual sun, but those from God! No soul will be lost, things temporal are full of weariness, but eternity is life-giving. I come from the land of the dead; thou also must one day journey through the deep valleys to reach the radiant mountain summits where dwell grace and all perfection. I cannot lead thee to Hedeby for Christian baptism; first must thou break the watery shield that covers the deep morass, and bring forth from its depths the living author of thy being and thy life; thou must first carry out thy vocation before thy consecration may take place!"

Then he lifted her up on to the horse, and gave her a golden censer like those she had seen in the Viking's hall. A fragrant perfume arose from it, and the open wound on the martyr's forehead gleamed like a radiant diadem. He took the cross from the grave, holding it high above him, while they rode rapidly through the air, across the murmuring woods, and over the heights where the mighty warriors of old lay buried, each seated on his dead war-horse. These strong men of war arose and rode out to the summits of the mounds; the broad golden circlets round their foreheads gleaming in the moonlight and their cloaks fluttering in the wind. The great dragon hoarding his treasure raised his head to look at them, and whole hosts of dwarfs peeped forth from their hillocks, swarming with red, green, and blue lights, like sparks from the ashes of burnt paper.

Away they flew over wood and heath, rivers and pools, up north toward the Wild Bog; arrived here, they hovered round in great circles. The martyr raised high the cross; it shone like gold, and his lips chanted the holy mass. Little Helga sang with him as a child joins in its mother's song. She

swung the censer, and from it issued a fragrance of the altar so strong and so wonder-working that the reeds and rushes burst into blossom, and numberless flower stems shot up from the bottomless depths; everything that had life within it lifted itself up and blossomed. The water lilies spread themselves over the surface of the pool like a carpet of wrought flowers, and on this carpet lay a sleeping woman. She was young and beautiful; little Helga fancied she saw herself, her picture mirrored in the quiet pool. It was her mother she saw, the wife of the Marsh King, the princess from the river Nile.

The martyred priest commanded the sleeping woman to be lifted up on to the horse, but the animal sank beneath the burden, as though it had no more substance than a winding-sheet floating on the wind; but the sign of the cross gave strength to the phantom, and all three rode on through the air to dry ground. Just then the cock crew from the Viking's hall, and the vision melted away in the mist which was driven along by the wind, but mother and daughter stood side by side.

"Is it myself I see reflected in the deep water?" said the mother.

"Do I see myself mirrored in a bright shield?" said the daughter. But as they approached and clasped each other heart to heart, the mother's heart beat the faster, and she understood.

"My child! my own heart's blossom! my lotus out of the deep waters!" and she wept over her daughter; her tears were a new baptism of love and life for little Helga. "I came hither in a swan's plumage, and here I threw it off," said the mother. "I sank down into the bog, which closed around me. Some power always dragged me down, deeper and deeper. I felt the hand of sleep pressing upon my eyelids. I fell asleep, and I dreamt — I seemed to be again in the vast Egyptian Pyramid; but still before me stood the moving alder stump which had frightened me on the surface of the bog. I gazed at the fissures of the bark and they shone out in bright colours

and turned to hieroglyphs; it was the mummy's wrappings I was looking at. The coverings burst asunder, and out of them walked the mummy king of a thousand years ago, black as pitch, black as the shining wood-snail or the slimy mud of the swamp. Whether it were the Mummy King or the Marsh King I knew not. He threw his arms around me, and I felt that I must die. When life came back to me I felt something warm upon my bosom; a little bird fluttering its wings and twittering. It flew from my bosom high up toward the heavy dark canopy, but a long green ribbon still bound it to me; I heard and understood its notes of longing: 'Freedom! Sunshine! To the Father!' I remembered my own father in the sunlit land of my home, my life and my love! and I loosened the ribbon and let it flutter away — home to my father. Since that hour I have dreamt no more; I must have slept a long and heavy sleep till this hour, when sweet music and fragrant odours awoke me and set me free."

Where did now the green ribbon flutter which bound the mother's heart to the wings of the bird? Only the stork had seen it. The ribbon was the green stem, the bow the gleaming flower which cradled the little baby, now grown up to her full beauty, and once more resting on her mother's breast. While they stood there, pressed heart to heart, the stork was wheeling above their heads in great circles; at length he flew away to his nest and brought back the swan plumages so long cherished there. He threw one over each of them; the feathers closed over them closely, and mother and daughter rose into the air as two white swans.

"Now let us talk!" said the father stork; "for we can understand each other's language, even if one sort of bird has a different-shaped beak from another. It is the most fortunate thing in the world that you appeared this evening. To-morrow we should have been off, mother and I and the young ones. We are going to fly southward. Yes, you may look at me! I am an old friend from the Nile, so is mother.

too; her heart is not so sharp as her beak! She always said that the Princess would take care of herself! I and the young ones carried the swans' plumage up here! How delighted I am, and how lucky it is that I am still here; as soon as the day dawns we will set off, a great company of storks. We will fly in front, you had better follow us and then you won't lose your way, and we will keep an eye upon you."

"And the lotus flower which I was to take with me," said the Egyptian Princess, "flies by my side in a swan's plumage. I take the flower of my heart with me, and so the riddle is solved. Now for home! home!"

But Helga said she could not leave the Danish land without seeing her loving foster-mother once more, the Viking's wife. For in Helga's memory now rose up every happy recollection, every tender word and every tear her foster-mother had shed over her, and it almost seemed as if she loved this mother best.

"Yes, we must go to the Viking's hall," said the father stork; "mother and the young ones are waiting for us there. How they will open their eyes and flap their wings! Mother doesn't say much; she is somewhat short and abrupt, but she means very well. Now I will make a great clattering to let them know we are coming!"

So he clattered with his beak, and he and the swans flew off to the Viking's hall.

They all lay in a deep sleep within; the Viking's wife had gone late to rest, for she was in great anxiety about little Helga, who had not been seen for three days. She had disappeared with the Christian priest, and she must have helped him away; it was her horse which was missing from the stable. By what power had this been brought to pass? The Viking's wife thought over all the many miracles which were said to have been performed by the "White Christ," and by those who believed in Him and followed Him. All these thoughts took form in her dreams, and it seemed to her that she was still

awake, sitting thoughtfully upon her bed while darkness reigned without. A storm arose; she heard the rolling of the waves east and west of her from the North Sea, and from the waters of the Cattegat. The monstrous serpent which, according to her faith, encompassed the earth in the depths of the ocean, was trembling in convulsions from dread of "Ragnarok," the knight of the gods. He personified the day of Judgment when everything should pass away, even the great gods themselves. The Gialler horn sounded, and away over the rainbow rode the gods, clad in steel to fight their last battle; before them flew the shield maidens, the Valkyries, and the ranks were closed by the phantoms of the dead warriors. The whole atmosphere shone in the radiance of the northern lights, but darkness conquered in the end. It was a terrible hour, and in her dream little Helga sat close beside the frightened woman, crouching on the floor in the form of the hideous frog. She trembled and crept closer to her foster-mother, who took her on her knee, and in her love pressed her to her bosom, notwithstanding the hideous frog's skin. And the air resounded with the clashing of sword and club, and the whistling of arrows as though a fierce hailstorm were passing over them. The hour had come when heaven and earth were to pass away, the stars to fall, and everything to succumb to Surtur's fire — and yet a new earth and a new heaven would arise, and fields of corn would wave where the seas now rolled over the golden sands. The God whom none might name would reign, and to Him would ascend Baldur the mild, the loving, redeemed from the kingdom of the dead — he was coming — the Viking's wife saw him plainly, she knew his face — it was that of the Christian priest, their prisoner. "White Christ," she cried aloud, and as she named the name she pressed a kiss upon the forehead of the loathsome toad; the frog's skin fell away, and before her stood little Helga in all the radiance of her beauty, gentle as she had never been before, and with beaming eyes. She kissed her foster-mother's hands, and blessed her for all

the care and love she had shown in the days of her trial and misery. She thanked her for the thoughts she had instilled into her, and for naming the name which she now repeated, "White Christ!" Little Helga rose up as a great white swan and spread her wings with the rushing sound of a flock of birds of passage on the wing.

The Viking's wife was wakened by the rushing sound of wings outside; she knew it was the time when the storks took their flight, and it was these she heard. She wanted to see them once more and to bid them farewell, so she got up and went out on to the balcony; she saw stork upon stork sitting on the roofs of the outbuildings round the courtyard, and flocks of them were flying round and round in great circles. Just in front of her, on the edge of the well where little Helga so often had frightened her with her wildness, sat two white swans, who gazed at her with their wise eyes. Then she remembered her dream, which still seemed quite real to her. She thought of little Helga in the form of a swan. She thought of the Christian priest, and suddenly a great joy arose in her heart. The swans flapped their wings and bent their heads, as if to greet her, and the Viking's wife stretched out her arms toward them as if she understood all about it, and she smiled at them with tears in her eyes.

"We are not going to wait for the swans," said the mother stork; "if they want to travel with us they must come. We can't dawdle here till the plovers start! It is very nice to travel as we do, the whole family together, not like the chaffinches and the ruffs, when the males and females fly separately; it's hardly decent! And why are those swans flapping their wings like that?"

"Well, every one flies in his own way," said the father stork. "The swans fly in an oblique line, the cranes in the form of a triangle, and the plovers in a curved line like a snake."

"Don't talk about snakes while we are flying up here,"

said the mother stork. "It puts desires into the young ones' heads which they can't gratify."

"Are those the high mountains I used to hear about?" asked Helga in the swan's plumage.

"Those are thunder clouds driving along beneath us," said her mother.

"What are those white clouds that rise so high?" again inquired Helga.

"Those are mountains covered with perpetual snows that you see yonder," said her mother, as they flew across the Alps down toward the blue Mediterranean.

"Africa's land! Egypt's strand!" sang the daughter of the Nile in her joy, as from far above, in her swan's plumage, her eye fell upon the narrow waving yellow line, her birthplace. The other birds saw it, too, and hastened their flight.

"I smell the Nile mud and the frogs," said the mother stork. "I am tingling all over. Now, you will have something nice to taste, and something to see, too. There are the marabouts, the ibis, and the crane. They all belong to our family, but they are not nearly so handsome as we are; they are very stuck up, though, especially the ibis, they have been so spoilt by the Egyptians. They make mummies of him, and stuff him with spices. I would rather be stuffed with living frogs, and so would you, and so you shall be! Better have something in your crops while you are alive than have a great fuss made over you after you are dead. That is my opinion, and I am always right."

"The storks have come back," was said in the great house on the Nile, where its lord lay in the great hall on his downy cushions covered with a leopard skin, scarcely alive, and yet not dead either, waiting and hoping for the lotus flower from the deep morass in the north.

Relatives and servants stood round his couch, when two great white swans who had come with the storks flew into the hall. They threw off their dazzling plumage, and there

"The Day-spring from on high hath visited us. To give light to them that sit in darkness, and to guide their feet into the way of peace"

stood two beautiful women as like each other as twin drops of dew. They bent over the pale, withered old man, throwing back their long hair.

As little Helga bent over her grandfather, the colour came back to his cheeks and new life returned to his limbs. The old man rose with health and energy renewed; his daughter and granddaughter clasped him in their arms, as if with a joyous morning greeting after a long troubled night.

Joy reigned throughout the house and in the stork's nest, too, but there the rejoicing was chiefly over the abundance of food, especially the swarms of frogs. And while the sages hastily sketched the story of the two Princesses and the flower of healing, which brought such joy and blessing to the land, the parent storks told the same story in their own way to their family; but only when they had all satisfied their appetites, or they would have had something better to do than to listen to stories.

"Surely you will be made something at last," whispered the mother stork. "It wouldn't be reasonable otherwise."

"Oh, what should I be made?" said the father stork; "and what have I done? Nothing at all!"

"You have done more than all the others! Without you and the young ones the two Princesses would never have seen Egypt again, nor would the old man have recovered his health. You will become something. They will at least give you a doctor's degree, and our young ones will be born with the title, and their young ones after them. Why, you look like an Egyptian doctor already, at least in my eyes!"

And now the learned men and the sages set to work to propound the inner principle, as they called it, that lay at the root of the matter. "Love is the food of life," was their text. Then came the explanations. "The Princess was the warm sunbeam, she went down to the Marsh King, and from their meeting sprang forth the blossom."

"I can't exactly repeat the words," said the father stork.

He had been listening on the roof, and now wanted to tell them all about it in the nest. "What they said was so involved and so clever that they not only received rank, but presents, too; even the head cook had a mark of distinction — most likely for the soup!"

"And what did you get?" asked the mother stork. "They ought not to forget the most important person, and that is what you are; the sages have only cackled about it all. But your turn will come, no doubt!"

Late at night, when the whole happy household were wrapped in peaceful slumbers, there was still one watcher. It was not Father Stork, although he stood up in the nest on one leg like a sentry asleep at his post. No, it was little Helga. She was watching, bending out over the balcony in the clear air, gazing at the shining stars, bigger and purer in their radiance than she had ever seen them in the north; and yet they were the same. She thought of the Viking's wife by the Wild Bog; she thought of her foster-mother's gentle eyes, and the tears she had shed over the poor frog-child, who now stood in the bright starlight and delicious spring air by the waters of the Nile. She thought of the love in the heathen woman's breast, the love she had lavished on a miserable creature, who in human guise was a wild animal, and when in the form of an animal was hateful to the sight and to the touch. She looked at the shining stars, and remembered the dazzling light on the forehead of the martyred priest as he flew over moorland and forest. The tones of his voice came back to her, and words that he had said while she sat overwhelmed and crushed — words concerning the sublime source of love, the highest love embracing all generations of mankind. What had not been won and achieved by this love? Day and night little Helga was absorbed in the thought of her happiness; she entirely lost herself in the contemplation of it, like a child who turns hurriedly from the giver to examine the beautiful gifts. Happy she was, indeed, and her happiness seemed ever growing; more might come,

would come. In these thoughts she indulged, until she thought no more of the Giver. It was in the wantonness of youth that she thus sinned. Her eyes sparkled with pride, but suddenly she was roused from her vain dream. She heard a great clatter in the courtyard below, and, looking out, saw two great ostriches rushing hurriedly round in circles; never before had she seen this great, heavy, clumsy bird, which looked as if its wings had been clipped, and the birds themselves had the appearance of having been roughly used. She asked what had happened to them, and for the first time heard the legend the Egyptians tell concerning the ostrich.

Once, they say, the ostriches were a beautiful and glorious race of birds, with large, strong wings. One evening the great birds of the forest said to it, "Brother, shall we to-morrow, God willing, go down to the river to drink?" And the ostrich answered, "I will!"

At the break of day, then, they flew off, first rising high in the air toward the sun, the eye of God; still higher and higher the ostrich flew, far in front of the other birds, in its pride flying close up to the light. He trusted in his own strength, and not on that of the Giver; he would not say "God willing!" But the venging angel drew back the veil from the flaming ocean of sunlight, and in a moment the wings of the proud bird were burnt, and he sank miserably to the earth. Since that time the ostrich and his race have never been able to rise in the air; he can only fly terror-stricken along the ground, or round and round in narrow circles. It is a warning to mankind, reminding us in every thought and action to say "God willing!"

Helga thoughtfully and seriously bent her head and looked at the hunted ostrich, noticed its fear and its miserable pride at the sight of its own great shadow on the white moonlit wall. Her thoughts grew graver and more earnest. A life so rich in joy had already been given her; what more was to come? The best of all perhaps — "God willing!"

Early in the spring, when the storks were again about to

take flight to the north, little Helga took off her gold bracelet, and, scratching her name on it, beckoned to Father Stork and put it round his neck. She told him to take it to the Viking's wife, who would see by it that her foster-daughter still lived, was happy, and had not forgotten her.

"It is a heavy thing to carry!" thought Father Stork, as it slipped on to his neck; "but neither gold nor honour are to be thrown upon the highway! The stork brings good luck, they say up there!"

"You lay gold, and I lay eggs," said Mother Stork; "but you only lay once and I lay every year. But no one appreciates us; I call it very mortifying!"

"One always has the consciousness of one's own worth, though, mother!" said Father Stork.

"But you can't hang it outside," said Mother Stork; "it neither gives a fair wind nor a full meal!" And they took their departure.

The little nightingale singing in the tamarind bushes was also going north soon; Helga had often heard it singing by the Wild Bog, so she determined to send a message by it, too. She knew the bird language from having worn a swan's plumage, and she had kept it up by speaking to the storks and the swallows. The nightingale understood her quite well, so she begged it to fly to the beechwood in Jutland, where she had made the grave of stones and branches; she bade it tell all the other little birds to guard the grave and to sing over it. The nightingale flew away — and time flew away too.

In the autumn an eagle perched on one of the Pyramids, saw a gorgeous train of heavily laden camels and men clad in armour riding fiery Arab steeds as white as silver with quivering red nostrils and flowing manes reaching to the ground. A royal prince from Arabia, as handsome as a prince should be, was arriving at the stately mansion where now even the stork's nest stood empty; its inhabitants were still in their northern home; but they would soon now return — nay, on the very day

when the rejoicings were at their height they returned. They were bridal festivities and little Helga was the bride clad in rich silk and many jewels. The bridegroom was the young prince from Arabia, and they sat together at the upper end of the table, between her mother and her grandfather.

But Helga was not looking at the bridegroom's handsome face round which his black beard curled, nor did she look into his fiery dark eyes which were fixed upon hers. She was gazing up at a brilliant twinkling star which was beaming in the heavens.

Just then there was a rustle of great wings in the air outside; the storks had come back. And the old couple, tired as they were and needing rest, flew straight down to the railing of the veranda; they knew nothing about the festivities. They had heard on the frontiers of the country that little Helga had had them painted on the wall, for they belonged to the story of her life.

"It was prettily done of her," said Father Stork.

"It is little enough," said Mother Stork; "they could hardly do less."

When Helga saw them she rose from the table and went out on to the veranda to stroke their wings. The old storks bowed their heads and the very youngest ones looked on and felt honoured. And Helga looked up at the shining star which seemed to grow brighter and purer; between herself and the star floated a form purer even than the air and therefore visible to her. It floated quite close to her and she saw that it was the martyred priest; he also had come to her great festival — come even from the heavenly kingdom.

"The glory and bliss yonder far outshines these earthly splendours," he said.

Little Helga prayed more earnestly and meekly than she had ever done before, that for one single moment she might gaze into the kingdom of Heaven. Then she felt herself lifted up above the earth in a stream of sweet sounds and thoughts.

The unearthly music was not only around her, it was within her. No words can express it.

"Now we must return; you will be missed," said the martyr.

"Only one glance more," she pleaded; "only one short moment more."

"We must return to earth; the guests are departing."

"Only one look — the last."

Little Helga stood once again on the veranda, but all the torches outside were extinguished and the lights in the banqueting hall were out, too; the storks were gone; no guests were to be seen; no bridegroom — all had vanished in those short three minutes.

A great dread seized upon Helga; she walked through the great empty hall into the next chamber where strange warriors were sleeping. She opened a side door which led into her own room, but she found herself in a garden, which had never been there before. Red gleams were in the sky, dawn was approaching. Only three minutes in Heaven, and a whole night on earth had passed away.

Then she saw the storks; she called to them in her own language. Father Stork turned his head, listened, and came up to her.

"You speak our language," he said. "What do you want? Why do you come here, you strange woman?"

"It is I, it is Helga; don't you know me? We were talking to each other in the veranda three minutes ago."

"That is a mistake," said the stork; "you must have dreamt it."

"No, no," she said; and she reminded him of the Viking's stronghold, and the Wild Bog, and their journey together.

Father Stork blinked his eyes and said, "Why, that is a very old story; I believe it happened in the time of my great-great-grandmother. Yes, there certainly was a princess in Egypt who came from the Danish land, but she disappeared on her wedding night many hundred years ago. You may

read all about it here, on the monument in the garden. There are both storks and swans carved on it, and you are at the top yourself, all in white marble."

And so it was: Helga understood all about it now and sank upon her knees.

The sun burst forth, and as in former times the frog's skin fell away before his beams and revealed the beautiful girl; so now, in the baptism of light, a vision of beauty, brighter and purer than the air — a ray of light — rose to the Father. The earthly body dropped away in dust — only a withered lotus flower lay where she had stood.

"Well, that is a new ending to the story," said Father Stork. "I hadn't expected that, but I like it very well."

"What will the young ones say about it?" asked Mother Stork.

"Ah, that is a very important matter," said Father Stork.

THE TRAVELING COMPANIONS

POOR JOHN was very sad, his father was ill and he knew that he could not recover. There was no one else in the little room besides these two; it was quite late at night and the lamp had nearly burnt out.

"You have been a good son, John," said the dying man. "I am sure the Lord will help you on in the world!" and he fixed his mild, gentle eyes upon his son, drew a long breath, and passed away so quietly he only seemed to be asleep. John wept bitterly, for now he had nobody in the world belonging to him, neither father nor mother, sister nor brother. Poor John! he knelt by the bedside and kissed his dead father's hands and shed many tears; but at last his eyes closed, and he fell asleep with his head against the hard bed-post.

He had a wonderful dream; he saw the sun and moon bowing before him, and he saw his father quite well and strong again; he laughed as he always used to laugh when he was very pleased. A lovely girl with a golden crown on her long, beautiful hair stretched out her hand to John, and his father said, "See

what a beautiful bride you have won. She is the loveliest maiden in the world." Then he woke up and all the beautiful things were gone; his father lay on the bed dead and cold, and there was no one else there — poor John!

The dead man was buried in the following week; John walked close behind the coffin, and he could no longer see his good father who had loved him so much. He heard the earth fall upon the coffin lid, and watched it till only a corner was left, and then the last shovelful fell upon it, and it was entirely hidden. He was so miserable, he felt as if his heart would break.

A beautiful psalm was being sung which brought the tears into his eyes; he wept, and this brought him relief. The sun was shining brightly on the green trees, and seemed to say, "Do not be so sad, John! See how blue the sky is; your good father is up there, and he will pray to God that all may be well with you."

"I will always be good!" said John, "and then I shall go to Heaven some time to my father, and what joy it will be to see each other again. How much I shall have to tell him; and he will have so much to show me, and to teach me about the bliss of Heaven, just as he used to teach me here on earth. Oh, what joy it will be!"

John saw it all so vividly that he smiled at the thought, although the tears still ran down his cheeks. The little birds in the chestnut tree twittered with joy, although they had been at the funeral, but they knew that the dead man was in Heaven, and that he now had wings larger and more beautiful than their own. They knew, too, that he was happy, because he had been a good man here on earth, and they were glad of it. John saw them fly away from the trees out into the world, and he felt a strong desire to fly away with them. But first he made a wooden cross to put up on his father's grave. When he brought it along in the evening he found the grave covered with sand and decorated with flowers.

This had been done by the strangers for love of his father. Early next morning John packed his little bundle and stowed away his sole inheritance in his belt; it only consisted of fifty dollars and a few silver coins, and with these he started out into the world. But first he went to the churchyard to his father's grave, where he knelt and said the Lord's prayer, and then added, "Farewell, dear father! I will always be good, and then you won't be afraid to pray to the good God that all may go well with me!"

The fields that John passed through were full of bright flowers nodding their heads in the warm sunshine as much as to say, "Welcome into the fields! Is it not lovely here?" but John turned round once more to look at the old church where he had been baptized, and where he had gone every Sunday and sung the psalms with his good old father. On looking back he saw standing in one of the loopholes of the tower the little church-Nissé with his pointed red cap, shading his eyes from the sun with his arm. John nodded good-bye to him, and the little Nissé waved his hand and kissed his fingers to him to show that he was sending his good wishes for a pleasant journey.

John now began to think how many beautiful things he would see in the great beautiful world before him, and he went on and on till he found himself much farther away than he had ever been before. He did not know the towns through which he passed, or the people he met; he was quite among strangers. The first night he had to sleep under a haystack in a field, for he had no other bed. But he thought it was lovely; no king could have had a better. The field by the river, the haystack, and the deep-blue sky above made a charming room. The green grass dotted with red and white flowers was the carpet, the elders and the rosebushes were growing bouquets, and he had the whole river for a bath, with its clear fresh water, and the rushes which nodded their heads bidding him both "Good-night" and "Good-morning." The moon was a great night

light high up under the blue ceiling, one which would never set fire to the curtains. John could sleep quite quietly without fear, and this he also did. He only woke when the sun was high up in the sky and all the little birds were singing, "Good-morning! Good-morning! Are you not up yet?"

The bells were ringing for church; people were on their way to hear the parson pray and preach, and John went with them. He sang a psalm and listened to the word of God, and he felt as if he were in his own old church, where he had been christened, and where he had sung the psalms with his father. There were a great many graves in the churchyard, and some of them were overgrown with long grass. John thought of his father's grave, which some day might look like these when he was no longer there to weed and trim it. So he knelt down, pulled up the long grass, and raised the wooden crosses which had fallen down. He picked up the wreaths which had been blown away, and replaced them, thinking that perhaps some one would do the same for his father's grave now he was away.

An old beggar was standing outside the churchyard leaning on a crutch, and John gave him the few silver coins he had left, and then went happily and cheerfully on into the wide world. Toward evening a fearful storm came on and John hurried to get under shelter, but it soon grew dark. At last he reached a little church standing on a solitary hill; the door was ajar, and he slipped in to take shelter till the storm was over.

"I will sit down here in a corner till the storm is over," he said; "I am quite tired and in need of a rest!" so he sat down, folded his hands, and said his evening prayer; and before he was aware he was asleep and dreaming while it thundered and lightened outside.

When he woke up it was the middle of the night and the storm was over: the moon was shining in upon him through the windows. In the middle of the aisle stood an open coffin with a dead man in it who was not yet buried. John was not

at all afraid, for he had a good conscience, and he knew that the dead can do no harm; it is living wicked people who do harm to others. There were two such bad men standing by the coffin. They had come to do harm to this poor dead man; to turn him out of his coffin and throw the body outside the church door.

"Why do you want to do this?" asked John. "It is very wicked and disgraceful; let the man rest, for Heaven's sake!"

"Oh, nonsense!" replied the wretches; "he cheated us, he owed us money which he could not pay, and now he has gone and died into the bargain, and we shall never see a penny, so we want to revenge ourselves. He shall lie like a dog outside the church doors!"

"I have not got more than fifty dollars," said John; "it is my whole inheritance, but I will gladly give it to you if you will honestly promise me to leave the poor dead man in peace. I shall manage very well without the money. I have good strong limbs, and the Lord will always help me."

"Well," said the bad men, "if you are ready to pay his debt like that, we won't do him any harm, we can assure you!"

And they took the money John gave them, laughing at him for being such a simpleton, and then they went away. John put the body straight again, folded the hands, said good-bye and went away through the woods in a state of great satisfaction. Around him where the moon pierced through the trees he saw numbers of little elves playing about merrily. They did not disturb themselves on his account, they knew very well that he was a good innocent person, and it is only bad people who never see the fairies. Some of them were no bigger than one's finger, and they had long yellow hair fastened up with golden combs. They swung hand in hand upon the big dewdrops which covered the leaves and the long grass. Sometimes the dewdrop rolled down, and then they fell with

Great spiders spun their webs from branch to branch . . . and the fairies swung hand in hand upon the big dewdrops which covered the leaves and the long grass

it down among the grass, and this caused great noise and laughter among the little folks. It was very amusing. They sang all the pretty little songs John used to know when he was a little boy. Great spiders with silver crowns upon their heads spun their webs from branch to branch like bridges connecting palaces. They glittered in the moonlight like glass where the dew had fallen on them. They went on with their sports till the sun rose, and the little creatures crept away into the flower buds, and the wind caught the bridges and palaces and swept them away into the air like cobwebs.

John had just got through the wood, when a strong man's voice called out behind him: "Hallo, comrade! whither away?"

"Out into the wide world," said John. "I have neither father nor mother, I am only a poor lad, but the Lord will protect me."

"I am going out into the wide world too!" said the stranger; "shall we go together?"

"By all means," said John, and so they walked on together.

They soon grew much attached to each other, for they were both good men, but John soon saw that the stranger was much wiser than himself; he had been round the greater part of the world, and he was well able to describe all that he had seen.

The sun was already high when they sat down under a big tree to eat their breakfast, and just then an old woman came up. She was very old and bent, and walked with a crutch; she had a bundle of sticks she had picked up in the wood on her back, and her apron was fastened up, and John could see in it three bundles or fagots of dried fern and some willow twigs. When she got near them, her foot slipped and she fell with a loud shriek; the poor old woman had broken her leg.

John wanted to carry her home, but the stranger opened his knapsack, and took out a little pot of salve, which he said would make her leg well directly, and she would be able to walk home as well as if she had never broken it. But in pay-

ment for it he wanted the three bundles of fern she had in her apron.

"That is very good payment," said the old woman, nodding her head rather oddly; she did not want to part with her three bundles of fern, but it was not so pleasant to lie there with a broken leg, so she gave him the fagots. As soon as he had rubbed on the salve, the old woman got up and walked away faster than she had been able to do before. This was all the effect of the salve; but no such ointment as this was to be had at any chemist's.

"What ever do you want with those bundles of fern?" said John to his companion.

"They make very good birch rods, and they are just what I like. I am a very queer fellow, you know!"

Then they walked on for a good bit.

"What a storm is drawing up there!" said John, pointing before him; "those are terribly black clouds."

"No," said his fellow traveller, "those are not clouds, they are mountains, beautiful high mountains, where you can get right above the clouds into the fresh air. It is splendid up there! To-morrow we shall just reach them."

They were not so near, however, as they seemed to be; it took them a whole day to reach the mountains, where the dark forest grew right up toward the sky, and where there were great boulders as big as houses, or even towns. It would be a heavy task to climb over all these, and so John and his fellow traveller went into an inn to rest and refresh themselves before they made the ascent next day. There were a number of people in the bar parlour at the inn, for there was a man showing off some marionettes. He had just put up his little theatre, and the people were sitting round waiting for the play to begin. A fat old butcher had taken up his place in the middle of the front row, and he had a ferocious-looking bulldog by his side, and it sat staring just as hard as anybody else.

Then the comedy began, and it was a very pretty play, with a King and a Queen in it. They sat on a velvet throne with golden crowns on their heads, and trains, for they could well afford it. The prettiest little wooden dolls stood by all the doors; they had bright glass eyes and big whiskers, and they were employed in opening and shutting the doors to let in the fresh air. It was a capital play and not at all a tragic one, but just as the Queen got up to walk across the floor — Heaven knows what idea entered the bulldog's head, but finding that the butcher was not holding him, he made a great leap forward right into the middle of the theatre and seized the Queen by the slender waist, and crunched her head up. It was a terrible disaster!

The poor showman was quite frightened and also very sad about his Queen, for she was his prettiest doll, and the horrid bulldog had entirely ruined her. But when all the people had gone away John's fellow traveller said he could make her all right again, and he took out his little pot and rubbed some of the same ointment on to the doll which had cured the poor old woman who had broken her leg. As soon as ever the doll had been rubbed over with the ointment she became whole again, nay, she could even move all her limbs herself; it was no longer necessary to pull the wires. The doll was exactly like a living being, except that she could not speak. The showman was delighted, because now he did not have to hold the wires at all for this doll, as she could dance quite well by herself, and none of the others could do that.

At night, when everybody had gone to bed, some one was heard sighing most dolefully, and it went on so long that everybody got up to see who it could be. The showman went along to his theatre, because that was where the sighs seemed to come from. All the wooden dolls were lying in a heap; it was the King and his guards who were sighing so dismally and staring with their glass eyes. They all wanted to be rubbed with some of the same ointment as the Queen, so that they might

be able to move their limbs as well as she did. She threw herself down on her knees and stretched out her hands with her golden crown, saying, "Pray, take this, but do, please, rub some of the ointment on to my consort and the courtiers!" The poor man who owned the theatre and the marionettes could not help crying, he was so sorry for them. He immediately promised the travelling companion that he would give him all the money he possessed if he would only anoint five or six of the prettiest dolls. But the travelling companion said that he did not want anything except the big sword that the showman wore at his side, and as soon as it was given him he anointed six dolls. They began to dance about at once so prettily that all the real, living girls who saw them began to dance, too. The coachman and the cook, the waiter and the chambermaid, and all the strangers joined in, as well as the shovel and the tongs; but those two fell on the top of each other just as they were making their first bound. It was indeed a lively night!

Next morning John and his travelling companion went away from them all, up the high mountains and through the great pine forests. They got so high that at last the church towers far below looked like little red berries among all the green; and they could see far away for many, many miles, to places where they had never been! John had never seen so many of the beauties of this beautiful world all together before. The warm sun shone brightly in the clear blue sky, and the huntsman was heard winding his horn among the mountains; it was all so peaceful and sweet that it brought tears to his eyes, and he could not help exclaiming, "Great God, I could fall down and kiss the hem of Thy garment out of gratitude for all Thy good gifts to us!"

His travelling companion also stood with folded hands looking at the woods and the villages basking in the warm sunshine. They heard a wonderful and beautiful sound above their heads, and looked up; a great white swan was hovering

in the air above them. It sang as they had never heard any bird sing before; but the song became fainter and fainter, and the swan gradually sank down before their feet, where it lay dead — the beautiful bird.

"Two such beautiful wings," said the travelling companion. "Such big white ones are worth a lot of money; I will take them with me. Now, you see what a good thing it was that I got this sword!" and with one blow he struck off both the wings of the dead swan, for he meant to keep them.

They travelled many, many miles over the mountains, till at last they saw before them a great town with over a hundred towers, which glittered like silver in the sunshine. In the middle of the town was a splendid marble palace, thatched with red gold, in which the King lived.

John and his travelling companion did not want to go into the town at once; they stopped at an inn outside to change their clothes, as they wished to look their best when they walked through the streets. The host told them that the King was such a good old man, he never did any harm to any one; but his daughter — Heaven preserve us! she was a wicked Princess.

Beauty she had more than enough of; nobody could be so beautiful and fascinating as she was, but what was the good of it when she was such a bad wicked witch, who was the cause of so many handsome Princes having lost their lives. She had given permission to anybody to court her. Any one who would might come, were he Prince or beggar — it was all the same to her; he only had to guess three riddles she asked him. If he could answer them, she would marry him, and he would be king over all the land when her father died; but if he failed to answer them, he either had to be hanged or to have his head cut off. So bad and so wicked was this beautiful Princess. Her father, the old King, was much grieved by it, but he could not prevent her from being so wicked, for he had once said that he would never have anything to do with her

lovers; she must deal with them herself as she liked. Every Prince who had yet come to guess the riddles so as to gain the Princess had failed, and so he had either been hanged or had his head cut off. Each one had been warned, and he need not have paid his addresses unless he had liked. The old King was so grieved by all this trouble and misery that he and his soldiers spent a whole day every year on their knees praying that the Princess might become good. But she had no intention of so doing. The old women who drank brandy dyed it black before they drank it; that was their way of mourning, and what more could they do!

"That vile Princess!" said John, "she ought to be well birched; that would be the best thing for her. If I were the King I would make the blood run!" Just then they heard all the people in the streets shouting "Hurrah!" The Princess was passing, and she was really so beautiful that when they saw her everybody forgot how wicked she was, and so they all shouted "Hurrah." Twelve beautiful maidens clothed in white silk with golden tulips in their hands, rode twelve coal-black horses by her side. The Princess herself was on a snow-white horse, adorned with diamonds and rubies; her riding dress was of pure gold, and the whip in her hand looked like a sunbeam. The golden crown on her head seemed to be made of little twinkling stars from the sky, and her cloak was sewn all over with thousands of beautiful butterflies' wings. But she was far, far more beautiful than all her clothes.

When John saw her his face became as red as blood, and he could hardly say a single word; the Princess was the image of the beautiful girl with the golden crown whom he had seen in his dream, the night his father died. He thought her so beautiful that he at once fell in love with her. It certainly could not be true, he thought, that she could be a wicked witch who allowed people to be hanged or executed if they could not guess her riddles. "Any one may pay his addresses

to her, even the poorest peasant: I will go to the Palace myself! I can't help going!"

They all said that he ought not to go, as he would only meet the same fate as the others. His travelling companion also advised him against going, but John thought he would be sure to get on all right; so he brushed his coat and his shoes, washed his hands and face, and combed his yellow hair, and then went quite alone to the town and straight up to the Palace.

"Come in," said the old King when John knocked at the door. He opened it, and the old King in his dressing-gown and slippers came toward him. He had his gold crown on his head, the sceptre in one hand, and the golden ball in the other. "Wait a moment," said he, tucking the ball under his arm so as to be able to shake hands with John. But as soon as he heard that John was a suitor he began to cry so much that both the ball and the sceptre rolled on to the floor, and he had to wipe his eyes with his dressing-gown. The poor old King!

"Leave it alone!" said he; "you are sure to fail just like the others, I am convinced of it!" Then he led John into the Princess' pleasure garden, which was a ghastly sight. From every tree hung three or four Kings' sons who had come to court the Princess, but who had all been unable to guess her riddles. With every gust of wind the bones rattled so that all the little birds were frightened away and they never dared come into the garden; all the flowers were tied up to human bones in the place of stakes, and human skulls grinned out of every flower-pot. It was indeed a nice garden for a Princess.

"Here you see," said the old King, "your fate will be just the same as all these. Do give it up. It makes me most unhappy, I take it so much to heart." John kissed the old King's hand and said he thought it would be all right, for he was so fond of the beautiful Princess.

Just then the Princess came herself with all her ladies driving into the Palace gardens, so they went up to her and

said "Good-morning." She was certainly very beautiful as she shook hands with John, and he was more in love with her than ever; it was impossible that she could be the wicked witch people said she was. They all went up into the hall and the little pages brought jam and gingerbread nuts to them; but the old King was so sad that he could eat nothing, besides the ginger nuts were too hard for him.

It was now decided that John was to come up to the palace the next morning, when the judges and all the council would be assembled to hear if he could guess the first riddle. If he succeeded the first time, he would have to come twice more, but nobody yet had ever guessed the first riddle — he had lost his life at once.

John was not a bit alarmed about himself; he was delighted, and only thought of the lovely Princess. He felt quite certain that the good God would help him, but in what manner it would be he had not the slightest idea, nor did he trouble his head about it. He danced along the highway, when he went back to the inn where his travelling companion was waiting for him. John was never tired of telling him how charming the Princess had been toward him, and how lovely she was. He was longing for the next day to come, when he was to go to the Palace to try his luck with the riddles. But his travelling companion shook his head and was quite sad.

"I am so fond of you," he said; "we might have been companions for a long time yet, and now I shall lose you directly! My poor, dear John, I could weep over you, but I will not spoil your pleasure on the last evening we perhaps may spend together. We will be merry, as merry as possible; to-morrow when you are gone I can be sad!"

Everybody in the town had heard directly that a new suitor had come for the Princess, and there was general mourning. The theatre was closed, and all the cakewomen tied black crape round the sugar pigs. The King and the priests were praying on their knees in the churches, and there was universal

Oh, what a flight that was through the air; the wind caught her cloak, and the moon shone through it

grief, for they all knew that there could be no better fate in store for John than for the other suitors.

Late in the evening the travelling companion made a great bowl of punch, and said to John that they must be merry now and drink the Princess' health. But when John had drunk two glasses he became so sleepy that he could not hold up his head, and he fell fast asleep. His travelling companion lifted him quietly up from his chair, and laid him on his bed. As soon as it was dark he took the two big wings which he had cut off the swan, and tied them on to his own shoulders; then he put the biggest bunch of twigs he had got from the old woman who had broken her leg, into his pocket, opened the window, and flew over the roofs of the houses right up to the Palace, where he sat down in a corner under the window of the Princess' bedroom.

The whole town was quiet. As the clock struck the quarter before twelve the window was opened, and the Princess flew out in a great white cloak and long black wings. She flew over the town to a great mountain, but the travelling companion made himself invisible and flew behind her, raining blows on to her back with his birch rod, till the blood flowed. Oh, what a flight that was through the air; the wind caught her cloak, which spread out on every side like the sail of a ship, and the moon shone through it.

"How it hails, how it hails!" said the Princess at every blow, but she richly deserved it.

At last they reached the mountain and knocked; there was a rumble as of thunder, the side of the mountain opened, and the Princess went in closely followed by the travelling companion. No one saw him, as he was quite invisible. They went through a long passage which glittered curiously, owing to thousands of shining spiders which swarmed over the walls, shedding a fiery light. They next reached a great hall built of gold and silver, with red and blue flowers as big as sunflowers all over the walls. No one could pick these flowers, for the stems were poisonous snakes, and the flowers were flames

coming out of their mouths. The ceiling was covered with shining glow-worms and pale-blue bats which flapped their transparent wings. This had an extraordinary effect. In the middle of the floor was a throne supported on four horses' legs with harness of the red fiery spiders. The throne itself was of milky glass, and the cushions were made of little black mice holding on to each other by the tails. There was a canopy above it of rose-coloured spider's web, dotted with the most exquisite little green flies which glittered like diamonds.

A hideous old ogre sat in the middle of the throne with a crown on his ugly head and a sceptre in his hand. He kissed the Princess on her forehead, and made her sit down by him on the costly throne; then the music began! Great black grasshoppers played upon Jews'-harps, and the owl beat upon his own stomach in place of a drum. It was a most absurd concert. Numbers of tiny little elves, each with a firefly on their little caps, danced round the hall. No one could see the travelling companion, but he could see and hear everything from behind the throne, where he had placed himself. The courtiers who now made their appearance looked most grand and proper, but any one who could really see perceived at once what they were. They were merely broomsticks with cabbages for heads, into which the ogre had put life by his magic powers and dressed them up in embroidered clothes. But this did not matter a bit, for they were only used on grand occasions.

After the dancing had gone on for a time, the Princess told the ogre that she had another suitor, and asked him what she had better think of to put as a riddle the next day.

"Listen!" said the ogre; "I will tell you what; you must think of something very simple, and then he will never think of it. Let us say one of your own shoes; he will never guess that. Then have his head chopped off, but don't forget when you come here to-morrow night to bring me his eyes. I want to eat them."

The Princess curtsied low, and said that she would not forget the eyes. The ogre opened the mountain, and she

flew home again; and, as before, the travelling companion followed her closely and beat her so hard with the birch rod that she groaned at the terrible hailstorm and hurried back as fast as she could to her bedroom window. The travelling companion flew back to the inn, where he found John still fast asleep. He took off his own clothes and went to bed too, for he had good right to be tired.

John woke quite early in the morning, and the travelling companion got up at the same time, and told him that he had had a wonderful dream about the Princess and her shoe; and he begged John to ask the Princess if she had not thought of her shoe. This was of course what he had heard the ogre say in the mountains, but he did not want to tell John anything about that, and so he merely told him it was a dream.

"I may just as well ask that as anything else!" said John; "perhaps your dream will come true, for I always think God will help me! All the same I will say good-bye, for if I guess wrong you will never see me again."

So they kissed each other, and John went to the town and up to the Palace. The hall was full of people; the judges were seated in their armchairs, and they had down pillows under their heads, for they had so much to think about. The old King stood near wiping his eyes with a white pocket handkerchief. Then the Princess came in, greeting every one very pleasantly, and she was even lovelier than yesterday. She shook hands with John and said, "Good-morning to you." Now John had to guess what she had thought of. She looked at him most sweetly, but as soon as she heard him say the word shoe, she turned as white as a sheet and trembled all over; but that was no good, for he had guessed aright.

Preserve us! how pleased the old King was. He turned head over heels without stopping, and everybody clapped their hands both on his account and on John's, whose first guess had been right.

The travelling companion beamed with delight when he

heard how successful John had been. But John folded his hands and thanked God, who no doubt would also help him on the two following occasions. The next day was fixed for the second riddle.

The evening passed just as the previous one had done. When John had gone to sleep the travelling companion flew behind the Princess to the mountain, and he beat her harder than ever, for this time he had taken two birch rods with him. Nobody could see him and he heard everything as before. The Princess was to think of her glove, and this he told John just as if it had been a dream. John of course could easily guess aright and again there was great delight at the Palace. The whole court turned somersaults as they had seen the King do the first time; but the Princess lay on the sofa and would not say a single word. Now all turned upon whether John guessed the third riddle or not. If he did, he would win the Princess and inherit the whole kingdom when the old King died; but if he was wrong, he would lose his life and the ogre would eat his beautiful blue eyes.

The evening before John went early to bed, said his prayers, and slept as peacefully as possible; but the travelling companion tied the wings on to his back, and bound the sword round his waist, took all the birch rods, and flew off to the Palace.

It was a pitch-dark night. There was such a gale that the tiles flew off the roofs, and the trees in the garden of bones bent like reeds before the wind. The lightning flashed every moment, and the thunder rolled continuously the whole night long. The window burst open and the Princess flew out; she was as pale as death, but she laughed at the storm as if it were not bad enough; her white mantle swirled about in the wind like the sails of a ship. The travelling companion beat her with his three birches till the blood dripped on to the ground. She could hardly fly any farther. At last they reached the mountain.

The courtiers looked most grand and proper. . . . Numbers of tiny little elves danced around the hall

"What a hailstorm there is!" she said as she entered. "I have never been out in such a bad one!"

"One may even have too much of a good thing!" said the ogre.

Then she told him that John's second guess had been right, and if he was successful again in the morning she would never be able to come and see him again in the mountain. Nor would she ever be able to do any more of the sorcerer's tricks as before, and she was very sad about it.

"He shall never guess it," said the ogre.

"I shall think of something that will never enter his head. But we will have some fun first!" And he took the Princess by both hands and they danced round the room with all the little elves and the fireflies. The red spiders ran merrily up and down the walls, and the fire flowers seemed to give out sparks. The owls played their drums, the crickets chirped, and the grasshoppers played their harps. It was a very gay ball.

After they had danced some time the Princess was obliged to go home or she would be missed, and the ogre said he would go with her so as to have more of her company.

So away they flew through the storm, and the travelling companion wore out his birch rods on their backs; never had the ogre been out in such a hailstorm. He said good-bye to the Princess outside the Palace, and whispered to her, "Think of my head"; but the travelling companion heard what he said, and at the very moment when the Princess slipped in at her window, and the ogre was turning away to go back, he seized him by his long black beard, and before he had time to look round cut off his head close to the shoulders with his big sword. He threw the body into the sea to be food for fishes, but he only dipped the head into the water and tied it up in his silk handkerchief and took it back to the inn, and he then went to bed.

Next morning he gave John the handkerchief, but said he

must not open it before the Princess asked him what she had thought about.

There were so many people in the hall that they were packed as close together as a bundle of radishes. The judges were sitting in their armchairs with the soft, down cushions; and the old King had his new clothes on, and his crown and sceptre had been polished up and looked quite festive. But the Princess was very, very pale, and she was dressed in black as if for a funeral.

"What have I thought of?" she asked John; and he immediately untied the handkerchief, and was very much frightened himself when he saw the hideous ogre's head. A shudder ran through the whole assemblage, but the Princess seemed turned to stone, and could not say a single word. At last she got up and gave her hand to John, for he had guessed all the riddles; she looked neither to the right nor to the left, but sighed deeply and said, "You are my master now; our wedding shall take place to-night." "I like that," said the old King; "that is just as it should be." All the people shouted hurrah, the guard's band played in the streets, the bells rang and the cakewomen took the crape off the sugar pigs, because all was now rejoicing. Three oxen stuffed with chickens and ducks were roasted whole in the market-place, and every one could cut off a portion for themselves. The fountains played wine instead of water, and any one who bought a penny roll had six large buns full of plums given in.

In the evening the whole town was illuminated. The soldiers fired salutes, and the boys let off squibs and crackers. At the Palace all was eating and drinking, toasting and dancing. The grand gentlemen danced with the pretty ladies, and the singing could be heard far and wide.

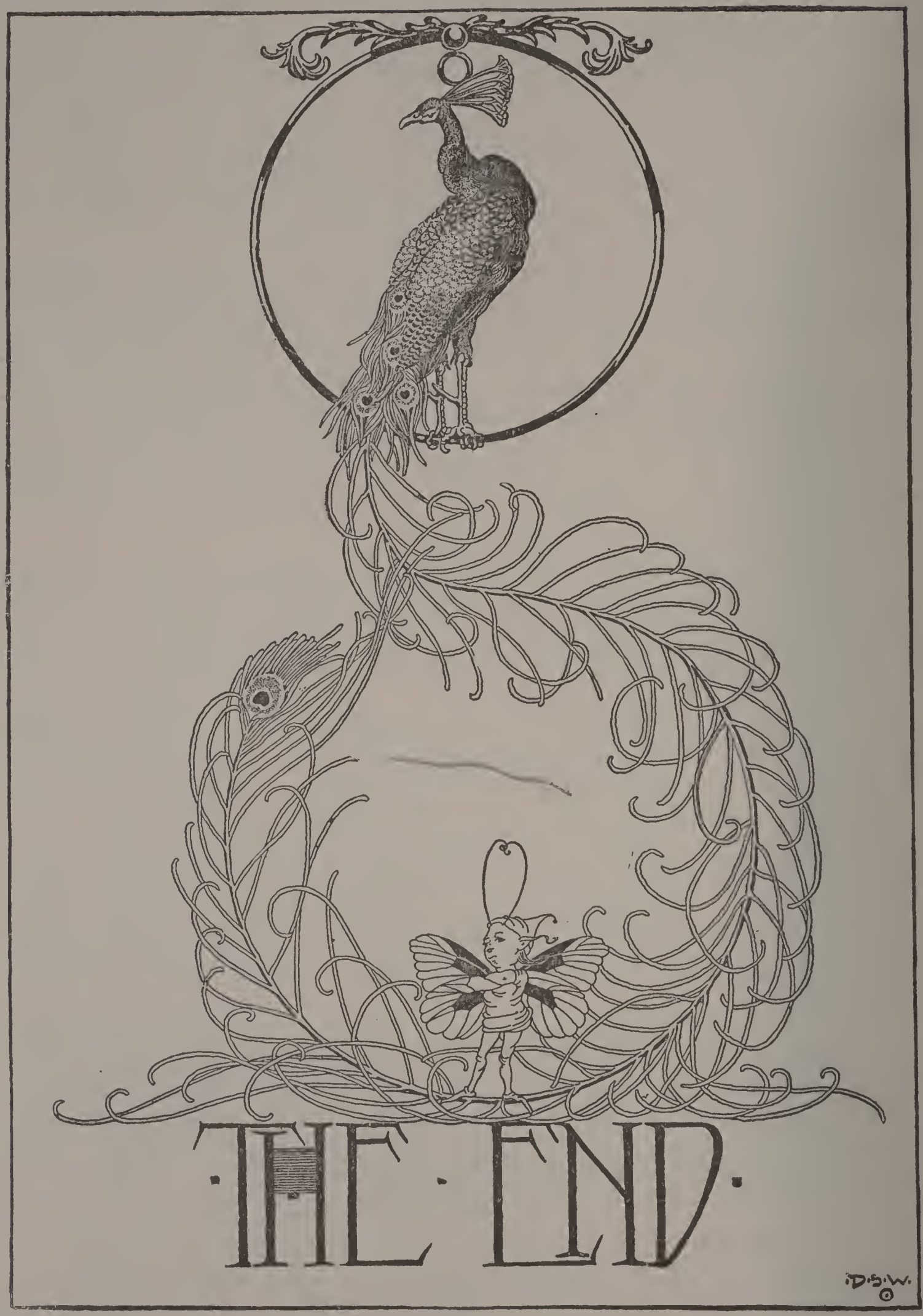
But the Princess was still bewitched, and she did not care a bit about John; the travelling companion knew this, and gave him three feathers out of the swan's wings and a little bottle with a few drops of liquid in it. He told John to have

a large bath full of water placed by the side of the bed, and when the Princess was going to get into bed he must give her a little push so that she fell into the water, where he was to dip her three times, first having thrown the three feathers and the drops of liquid into it. She would then be released from the spell and would grow very fond of him.

John did everything as he was told. The Princess shrieked when he dipped her into the water, and struggled in his hands in the form of a black swan with glittering eyes. The second time she came up as a white swan, except for a black ring round the neck. John prayed humbly to God, and the third time she came up as a lovely Princess. She was more lovely than she had been before, and thanked him, with tears in her eyes, for having released her from the spell.

Next morning the old King came with all his courtiers to offer their congratulations, and this went on all day. Last of all came the travelling companion; he had his stick in his hand and his knapsack on his back. John kissed him over and over, and said that he must not go away; he must stay with them, as he was the cause of all their happiness. But the travelling companion shook his head, and said gently and tenderly, "No; my time is up. I have only paid my debt. Do you remember the dead man whom you prevented the wicked men from disturbing? You gave all that you possessed so that he might have rest in his grave. I am the dead man!" And then he immediately vanished.

The wedding festivities lasted a whole month. John and the Princess were devoted to each other, and the old King had many happy days in which to let their little children play "ride a cock-horse" on his knee and to play with his sceptre. But John was King over the whole country.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